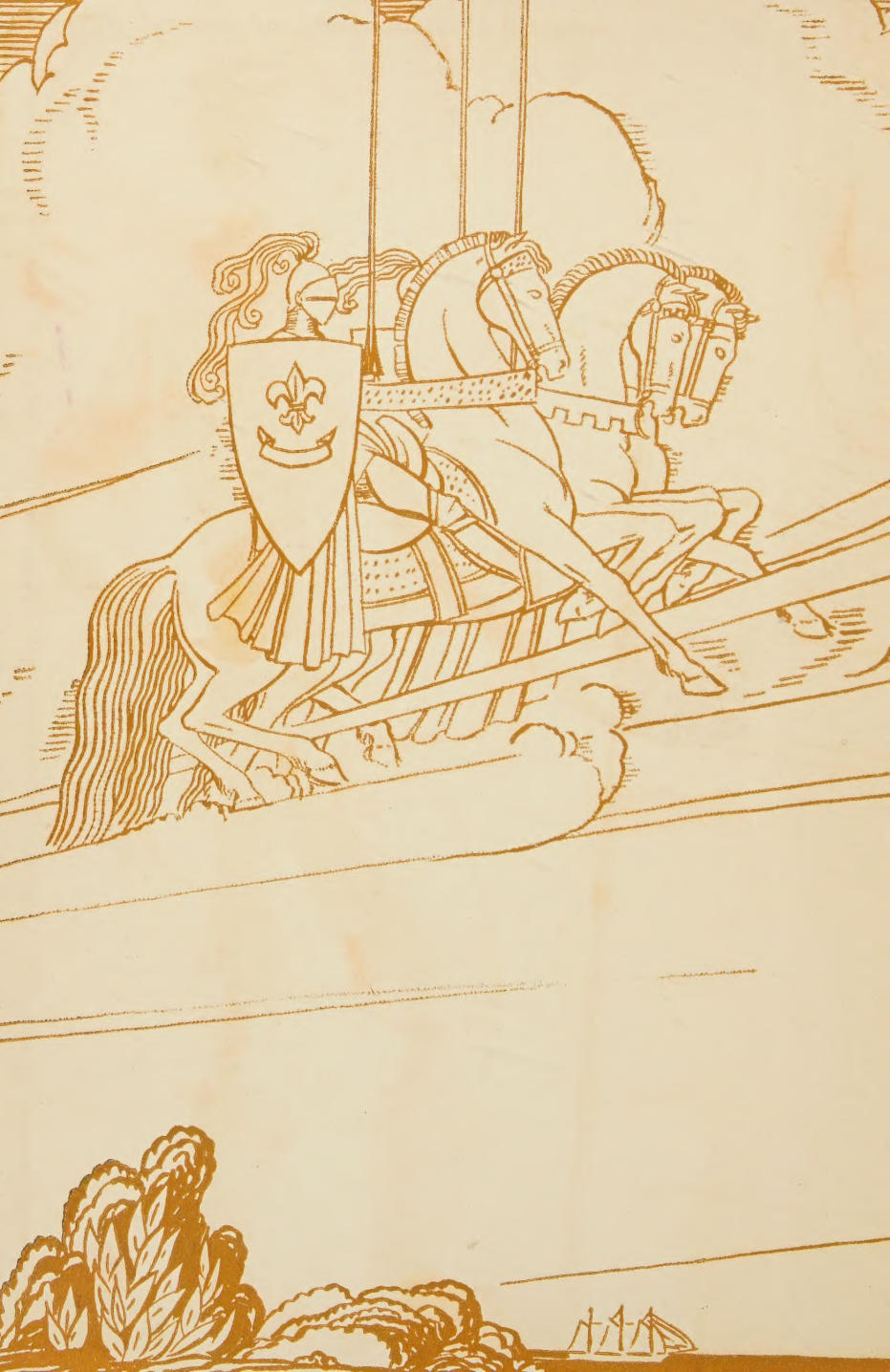
THREE POINTS OF HONOR

RUSSELL GORDON CARTER



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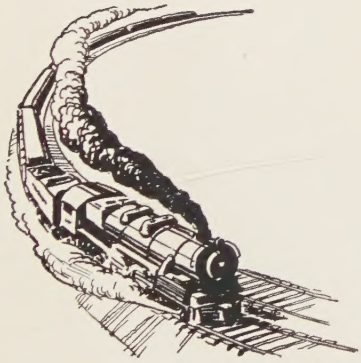

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The next morning Rodney began his duties at the bookshop.

THREE POINTS OF HONOR

BY
RUSSELL GORDON CARTER

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRIE WOOD

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TO

COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

WHOSE COURAGE AND HUMANITARIAN WORK ON THE ILL-FATED SUBMARINES, S 51 AND S 4, SET A STANDARD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT WORTHY OF THE FINEST EXPECTATIONS OF HIS ALMA MATER — THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

FOREWORD

It is part of the romance of the Boy Scout idea that it came to us across the Atlantic on the wings of a Good Turn. That story has been told many times. A Boy Scout seeing an American traveler bewildered by fog on a London street, took him to his destination and refused a shilling tip, claiming his privilege as a Scout to "help other people at all times." As a direct result Mr. W. D. Boyce came back with information and literature that led to the organizing of the Boy Scouts of America, and opening the way for four million boys to date to join in the great game of Scouting.

A tremendous result from the simple act of a boy who did his best to live up to his Scout Law! Who can say what it has meant in bringing the spirit of romance and adventure to the American boy, to whom the word Scout has a wealth

of meaning peculiarly American? The Indian scout, walking like a ghost through our forest glades, was peerless until the coming of our own frontier scouts, and both of them are a part of our inheritance. To the American boy the Scout program has meant living again in the spirit of Boone and Crockett, Kenton, Carson, Bridger, Fremont and Burnham . . . to walk silently, to learn of the trees, of the ways of men and beasts, to make camp under the pines, to build a fire, to cook, to fish and swim, to read sign, to find his way by the stars, to hike along a woodland trail and breathe its fragrance, to take friendly notice of the birds, and stalk shy animals and watch them at play, or shoot them through a camera lens . . . what magic there is in the word Scout!

Wonderful as this is, there is an even more adventurous phase of being a Scout. I like to speak of it as the adventure in honor. The Oath and Law, the motto "Be Prepared", and the "Do a Good Turn Daily" are the Code of the Scout. It has come to mean so much in the American boy's life to-day that it has almost

completely displaced "Honest Injun", "Cross your heart", and other expressions common in the boy's world of yesterday. Nowadays the demand is "Scout Honor?" when boys need assurance of truthfulness, integrity, or reliability from one another.

From the very beginning the Movement has thought of the Knight as the forerunner of the Scout, and in our code we derive almost directly from them. The code of Arthur's Knights bears many striking resemblances to our own. Consider for instance, "Chivalry requireth that youth should be trained to perform the most laborious and humble offices with cheerfulness and grace; and to do good unto others." Where there is a difference, it is a difference in conditions, not of spirit, for who will say that the modern Scout-knight has not caught the spirit of "Defend the poor and help them that cannot defend themselves" with his First Aid, with the thousands of rescues they make each year, hundreds at great personal risk.

The other day I was running over in my mind the twelve Scout Laws, and considering how

well they apply to what I know of the lives of our great pioneer scouts. Of their *loyalty* we need not speak — it was self-evident. Their *trustworthiness* was phenomenal. Friend and foe alike asked nothing better than their word. The Indian, even on the war path, seemed to regard these old-time scouts with the utmost friendliness. It was all Boone could do to keep himself from being permanently adopted by the Indians. In the midst of much bitterness the scout seemed to be able to keep his *friendly* feeling, even to his enemies. His *cheerfulness* in every situation, no matter what the hazard, seems unbelievable, and what record of any set of men can compare with the *bravery* these men displayed? Most striking of all was their attitude of *reverence* — reverence to the Great Spirit, and respect for the customs and faith even of their enemies. Indeed, it seems that the Scout Oath and Law might have been written from the lives of our frontier scouts. Knight and scout . . . the Boy Scout Program has captured their magic essence, and with it the imagination of the American boy.

It is because this "adventure in honor" is a never failing interest to Boy Scouts that I took the keenest pleasure as Editor of *Boys' Life* in joining hands with Little, Brown, and Company in offering a prize of $4,000 for the best story submitted to us in competition, based upon the principles of the Scout Oath and Law. Those of us who are interested in helping to make life rich for boys and to make boys well-endowed for life know that one of our great aids is good reading matter. A fine story sheds an influence like that of a fine soul. "Three Points of Honor" was the unanimous choice of the editorial staff of Little, Brown, and Company and *Boys' Life*, and I take the greatest pleasure in commending it to all boys.

JAMES E. WEST
Chief Scout Executive,
Boy Scouts of America,
Editor, *Boys' Life.*

January 1, 1929

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CHAPTER I

VICTORY EQUALS WILL

Rodney Owen raced down the left side of the basketball court and leaped into the air. The ball, passed high and swift, smacked against his upstretched hands, and dodging the rush of the opposing guards, he sent it flying towards the basket.

The spectators, massed on either side of the court and in the gallery of the Middleton High School gymnasium, held their breath as they watched the ball rise toward the rafters and then fall in a graceful curve. It struck the backstop and bounded downward against the iron rim; it sprang upward again and fell against the rim a

second time. There it hesitated in a succession of tiny bounces; then it rolled lazily off to the right and dropped towards the floor. At that moment the whistle blew, announcing the end of the first half of the game between Georgeburgh and Middleton — the final game of the season to decide the high-school championship of western Ohio.

"Hard luck, Rod!" some one shouted.

"Good try, Rod, old man!" added another consoling voice. "Pretty work if it had gone in!"

"Yeh, but it did n't!" retorted a Middleton supporter. "Poor old Georgeburgh! Twenty-four to nine — some score!"

"Never mind, Rod, we 'll show 'em next year!" shouted one of the Georgeburgh crowd.

"Yeh, next year, Rod!"

Rodney grinned in response to the remarks, but in his heart there was resentment. Only the end of the first half, yet everybody seemed to think his team was hopelessly beaten — not only the Middleton supporters, but even the little band of Georgeburgh rooters who had made the long trip to witness the game! He threw his sweater

across his shoulders and followed his teammates toward the locker room reserved for them. When he reached it, they were lying stretched out on the benches in attitudes of weariness and dejection. It was clear that they, too, considered themselves hopelessly beaten.

Rodney sat down, panting, and mopped the sweat from his face. Afterwards it seemed to him strange that he should have thought of his mother just at that moment when the most important thing in life was basketball. He had not seen her for almost a week; on the Monday before, she had gone to Hartsdale, across the river in Kentucky, for a fortnight's visit at the home of a friend. There was nothing strange about that; for the past year Mrs. Parker had been urging her to come, and there was a good reason for his mother's accepting the invitation at this particular time, during his spring vacation — but why had she not written to him? It was unlike her not to write. The memory of something vague and disquieting stirred within him, but with a sudden tightening of his lips he put it aside and turned upon his teammates.

"Listen, fellows! Do you know what the score is?" His voice was hard, challenging. His sea-blue eyes, usually so mild, flashed with indignation, almost with anger.

Frank O'Connor, the other forward, grinned ruefully. Bill Zimmerman and Ed Brown, the guards, made no sign of having heard. Paul Stearns, the tall center, pushed himself to a sitting posture, slowly rubbing a bruised shoulder.

"Sure, we know the score," Stearns observed in a gloomy voice, "twenty-four to nine — and it'll be a lot worse at the end of the second half!"

Ed Brown gazed straight upward at the gray, steam-chipped ceiling. "Luck's against us, Rod. Take that last shot of yours — missed by a millionth of an inch!"

"And we must have missed at least ten other baskets just the same way!" Zimmerman added morosely.

Rodney's teeth came together with a click. He passed a hand impatiently through his moist brown hair, thrusting it back from his forehead. "The second half's going to be different!" he cried.

He was on his feet now — a tall, loose-jointed, broad-shouldered boy with fists clenched in front of his chest. "Snap out of it! We're not beaten! We're not even half-beaten! Listen, now — do we want to win this championship? Of course we do! But we'll never win it if we just talk about hard luck and how big the final score's going to be!"

"Sure, that's right," agreed O'Connor, frowning. "We've got to go into the second half and fight!"

"We've got to do more than that!" retorted Rodney, thumping a fist against the palm of his hand. "We've got to start the second half with the will to win! And we can do it. Listen, fellows!" His voice quivered with emotion. "Remember that talk on General Foch we heard at one of the troop meetings last year? Remember what Foch said? He said, 'Victory is a thing of the will. Victory goes always to those who deserve it by the greater force of will.' And, by golly, Foch ought to know!"

The others were all sitting up now, gazing with a sort of reluctant interest at their leader. They

had never before seen him roused to such a pitch of determination; they had never before seen his eyes flash with such fierce-burning fire. This was altogether a different boy from the good-natured, easy-going Rodney Owen who had led them through victory after victory to the verge of a championship. They just stared at him, not knowing what to say.

"Listen, now!" continued Rodney. "To-night we'll be in camp with the gang. What'll they say if we're licked — licked badly? What'll they think of us?"

"Huh —" began Stearns and then was silent.

Footsteps sounded on the duckboards of the locker room, and Mr. Fisher, the high school coach — he was also Scoutmaster of the Georgeburgh troop to which all five of the boys belonged — appeared at the farther end of the aisle. It was his intention to speak to his boys, to encourage them as best he could; but seeing Rodney standing before them with fists clenched and face almost the color of his jersey, the coach paused and then retraced his steps. At that moment he was not needed — and he knew it!

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Rodney. "Are we going to let Middleton beat us?"

Ed Brown was the first to find his voice. "I guess they won't beat us by much —"

"You're right they won't!" Rodney interrupted him fiercely. "They won't beat us at all! What's fifteen points? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Come on, now, make up your minds we're going to win! I know you're tired. So am I tired! But let's forget how tired we are! Let's forget everything except that we're going to cut down that lead and win! I tell you we're a better team than Middleton! It's up to us to prove it! The will to win — that's all we need! And then to-night at camp we can face the gang, with heads up!"

O'Connor glared at the rows of green lockers. "If I could only shake off that little guy, Martinelli —"

"Yeh," Stearns interrupted him, "and if I could only get the jump once in a while on that lanky bean pole, Art Baker —"

"You'll do it!" exclaimed Rodney. "You'll both do it! And Ed and Bill will stick to Mason

and McLaren — stick right to them all the time!" he added, shaking his fist. "And I 'll take care of Gregg. By golly, we 'll show everybody in Ohio what the Georgeburgh team can do! Remember Foch, fellows! Remember his formula: 'Victory equals will.' And if anybody feels like quitting —"

"Who 's goin' to quit?" Brown demanded angrily.

"Nobody!" retorted O'Connor.

"You 're right they won't!" declared Stearns. "If Rod here thinks so, he 'll see —"

"He won't see me!" cried Zimmerman. He thrust out his jaw and added, "I 'm ready! Why don't they blow that whistle?"

Rodney felt a sudden pride in his teammates. No, they would not quit; they would not slow up. It would be altogether a different team in the second half. There was a new look in their eyes!

A shrill whistle sounded in the gymnasium.

"Let 's go!" cried Rodney.

And crowding close, the Georgeburgh team hurried back to the basketball court — five alert,

resolute boys in red jerseys. To the surprise of the onlookers, they ran to their respective positions and, "on their toes," began to dance about, flexing arms and legs and shouting words of fierce encouragement to one another.

"Huh!" observed a Middleton rooter. "Looks as if old Georgeburgh meant to hold the score down this half. They're rarin' to go!"

A boy beside him grinned. "Sure," he added, "they're supposed to go to Scout Camp after it's over, and I guess they think the doors'll be locked on 'em if they get a bad licking!"

The Middleton team, clad in white jerseys, came forth with an air of boisterous confidence. Homer Gregg, the right guard, grinned as he took his place beside Rodney. "Lots o' pep?" he demanded. "You'll need it this half! We're goin' to run away from you!"

Rodney slid his right foot back, signalling that he would go in for the ball. He kept his eyes fixed on the referee.

"Ready, Middleton?"

Art Baker nodded.

"Ready, Georgeburgh?"

"We 're ready," said Rodney.

The referee tossed the ball up and blew his whistle. The two centers leaped into the air, and for the first time Stearns got the jump on his opponent. Rodney secured the ball and, evading his guard, whirled and sent it flying toward O'Connor, who had crossed to the left of the court. He picked it out of the air, took a step that carried him free from the charge of little Johnny Martinelli and with a forward push of his right hand shot it into the basket.

A burst of cheers went up from the group of Georgeburgh supporters. It was a pretty play from signals, a pretty pass, a pretty shot!

"Come on, now, everybody!" cried Rodney as they lined up again. He slid his left foot back, and when the whistle sounded, he raced across the court.

Again Stearns got the jump. O'Connor secured the ball and whirled to pass it to Rodney; but Rodney was covered by both guards. O'Connor dribbled towards the basket and then, as Baker crashed into him, passed to Stearns. Gregg, coming forward, was on the center in a

flash ; but Rodney was free now, and taking the ball on a short pass, he scored from almost under the basket.

A second roar of approval rose from the side lines — a louder roar than the first one. It set Rodney's blood to tingling. Again he gave O'Connor's signal, but on the next play Stearns missed the jump, and Mason secured the ball. A rapid succession of passes carried it down to Georgeburgh's goal, but there Brown and Zimmerman each covered his man so effectively that the ball went outside.

Stearns caught the pass from Brown, evaded Baker and Mason and passed to Zimmerman, who dribbled to the center of the court and sent the ball to Rodney in one corner. Cries of "Shoot! Shoot!" came from the side line. Rodney hesitated, then crouched with deliberate aim. But even as he was about to shoot he saw O'Connor, closely followed by Martinelli, racing down the other side of the court in a wide curve towards the basket, and suddenly straightening, he sent the ball toward his teammate. O'Connor caught it on his chest a dozen feet from the basket

and, rising like a bird, dropped it into the iron circle — a shot that earned him a loud ovation.

The score was now twenty-four to fifteen, and some of those who had predicted a bad beating for Georgeburgh were willing to concede them a slim chance to win. But soon after the next toss-up Art Baker got loose from his opponent, made a long dribble and a quick pass to McLaren, received the ball again and scored from beside the basket. After that, in a scrimmage, the referee called a foul on Brown and Zimmerman, and Baker made the extra point.

Rodney noted the long faces of the two guards. "Never mind!" he shouted. "Couldn't be helped. Come on, now, on your toes! We'll show 'em! Up you go, Paul — way up this time!"

And Stearns got the jump again. He did more than that; taking a pass from Rodney, he made a long successful shot from the side. Then, a few minutes later, Bill Zimmerman, on a guard-forward play, received the ball from O'Connor and, with Gregg clawing desperately at him,

made a short, one-handed shot that brought the Georgeburgh score up to nineteen; McLaren then scored two points for Middleton; but in the next few minutes Rodney and O'Connor each shot a basket, and Stearns followed with a goal from foul.

Slowly, fighting for every point, Georgeburgh continued to gain. Rodney seemed to be everywhere on the court, blocking, passing, shooting, urging his team to greater efforts. And they responded as boys always respond to a leader who knows how to set an example by his deeds.

With three minutes left to play, the score was thirty-three to thirty-one in favor of Middleton, and excitement was at a fever pitch. This was what a championship game should be!

With two minutes to play, a foul was called on Middleton. Stearns had missed his last try for a point from foul, and now he looked doubtfully at his leader.

"Go ahead!" said Rodney. "Take your time. You'll make it!"

Stearns set his lips and gauged the distance.

The ball rose, struck the backstop and swished downward through the basket. Thirty-three to thirty-two!

"One minute to play!" came a voice from the sideline.

Rodney felt something akin to panic. In one minute the game would be over! In one minute, unless Georgeburgh scored, the championship would be lost! Keenly aware of the swift passage of time, he gave O'Connor's signal and called upon Stearns to put all his strength into the jump.

In spite of Rodney's plea, Baker knocked the ball over Stearns's head, but Bill Zimmerman, coming in before his forward, secured it and passed to Brown, the only man free at the moment. Brown dribbled it a few yards and then advanced it to O'Connor. Baker closed in upon the right forward, but O'Connor writhed free and passed to Stearns.

"Paul! Paul!"

The center whirled and saw Rodney, with Gregg and Martinelli on either side of him, racing across the court parallel with the back stop.

Stearns took a desperate chance and made a high, swift pass.

Rodney seemed suddenly to climb into the air after the ball. The two guards jumped for it at the same time, but it was Rodney's fingers that touched it, held it — held it for a fraction of a second while over his shoulder he cast a quick glance toward the basket. Then his arms stiffened in an awkward sidewise shot — and the next instant he landed on hands and knees on the floor. A roar filled his ears, and looking up, he saw the ball bound downward against the iron rim and leap into the air. He saw it strike the rim a second time and hesitate in a succession of bounces, and the sickening thought came to him that it was going to roll off after the manner of his final try at the end of the first half. He sprang to his feet, and as he did so, the ball made one more bounce and dropped through the netting!

Amid the tumult of shouting, O'Connor staggered his leader with a blow on the back. "Rod!" he gasped. "Oh, boy! What a shot! We're ahead of 'em now!"

Rodney's whole body was quivering with nervous excitement. Thirty-four to thirty-three! One point ahead! He ran to his position, shaking his fist frantically at Brown and Zimmerman. "Hold 'em, fellows!" he pleaded. "Hold 'em, Georgeburgh! Stick close, everybody! Everybody watch his man!"

The referee put the ball into play, and Rodney went forward after it. Again Stearns was outjumped, and this time Mason got the ball; but as he turned to pass to McLaren, Rodney was upon him — and at that instant the timekeeper's whistle shrilled above the noise of shouting. The game was over!

A sudden rush of boys from the sidelines sent Rodney staggering. They pushed him and thumped him on the back. They shouted his name in a roar that almost deafened him. Few though they were, compared with the Middleton-supporters, they made more noise than Middleton had made at any point during the game. He struggled free from them at last; then they turned their enthusiasm loose upon O'Connor and Stearns and the two guards.

It was not until ten minutes later, after receiving the congratulations of the Middleton players, that the Georgeburgh team was once more together in the locker room; there, in the joy of victory, they hugged one another. And then at last O'Connor gasped, "But it was Rod who did it —"

"You bet!" cried Stearns. "That last shot — and what he said to us between the halves —"

"Bunk!" protested Rodney, struggling out of his jersey. "Just stop and think of that final goal. Every one of us had the ball! Great teamwork — that's what did it!"

But the others would listen to no such sophistry! Well they knew that at the end of the first half they were a beaten team, that they would have been a beaten team at the end of the second half save for the words and example of their leader.

Rodney felt like shouting forth his joy. It was not the victory alone that was so sweet, but rather the manner in which it had come — through sheer force of will in the face of overwhelming odds! He felt that he had somehow

surpassed himself, that in leading his team to success he had drawn upon some hidden strength of which he had been ignorant. The thought was new and brought with it a thrill of mastery that he had never in his life experienced.

"Boys, I'm proud of you!" exclaimed Mr. Fisher as he joined them. "I haven't the words to tell you how much! You did it all alone —"

"Thanks to your coaching," added Rodney.

Mr. Fisher shook his head. "I'm a poor coach, everybody knows that." With an abrupt movement he drew forth his watch. "Thirty-five minutes to catch the train. Can we make it?"

"Easy!" cried Stearns — and broke a shoe lace to prove it!

"Make it in five minutes if I had to!" exclaimed O'Connor, seizing his towel and rushing towards the showers.

A little more than a quarter of an hour later the boys boarded the train at Middleton station, in company with their coach and half a dozen Scouts from the same Troop. An hour's ride would take them to the town of Binghamville,

whence a short trip by motor bus would carry them to the Clearing, the camp site beside the Ohio River, where they were to spend the second week of the spring vacation. Most of the Troop, under the supervision of the Junior Assistant Scoutmaster, had gone up to the Clearing that morning in order to put the camp in readiness.

Mr. Fisher sat with Rodney during the ride. He was a big, strongly built man with a florid complexion, kindly blue eyes, heavy black eyebrows and curly iron gray hair. He turned now to the boy and, with a smile, said, "Well, how do you feel?"

"Happy!" was the reply. "A bit tired, though, and terribly hungry!"

The Scoutmaster laughed. "I guess we all need rest and food after what happened this afternoon! Won't the other boys be pleased, though!"

"I wonder if they've heard the result?"

"Oh, I imagine so. Some one must have telephoned from camp. You'll be greeted like conquering heroes."

Rodney smiled; but a few moments later the thought of his mother came again with sudden sobering effect. Why had he not heard from her? Of course she knew he was going away to camp for a week — but was n't that all the more reason why she should have written? Nervously and physically tired after the strenuous game, he began to imagine all sorts of disturbing things about her. Was it just his imagination, or had she really looked worn out during the last days they were together? He was not sure — but again the memory of something vague and disquieting came to him, and again he thrust it from his mind. After all, he was only meeting trouble halfway; what was the sense of worrying unnecessarily, of spoiling the glorious week that lay ahead? His mother would n't want him to do that! He took a fresh hold upon himself. Doubtless she had written; he had left Georgeburgh before the first mail; doubtless the letter was at home, and Mrs. Heath, their next-door neighbor, with whom he had been taking his meals during the past week, would forward it. Probably she already had forwarded

it. There was no need for worry, none whatsoever!

During the rest of the ride to Binghamville he allowed his thoughts to dwell pleasantly on the incidents of the game.

Mr. Fisher was correct in his surmise; when the boys climbed out of the bus at the Clearing, they received a vociferous welcome — a welcome that left no doubt that they were conquering heroes! George Cole, the Junior Assistant Scoutmaster, had telephoned to the newspaper office at Middleton, and every one at camp knew the result of the game. And now Rodney and his teammates were treated to a demonstration similar to the one they had received on the floor of the gymnasium.

"Wow!" cried young Dicky Dover as he squeezed Rodney's hand. "I knew you'd do it! I knew Georgeburgh had the goods all along!"

"Listen to the runt!" exclaimed Willis Branch. "Dicky isn't even out of grammar school yet and —"

"Never mind!" was the retort. "I'll be in high next year!"

"You're all right, Dicky," said another. "We all feel the way you do. The team brought honor to Georgeburgh, and we're tickled they belong to this Troop!"

"What's to eat?" demanded Ed Brown.

"Beans!" was the reply.

"Lead us to 'em!" said O'Connor. "We're starved!"

The Clearing consisted of three or four rough wooden shacks, called cabins, that occupied a narrow sloping plain between two stretches of young growth overlooking the river. Twice before the Troop had camped there — once during a part of the previous spring vacation, and again over a long week-end the preceding fall. Everything therefore was familiar to Rodney; and everything promised a wonderful week ahead — the broad, unspoiled open country, the spicy odor of wood smoke on the cool night air, the placid, moonlit river that gleamed among the slender tree trunks.

In company with Frank O'Connor, he stowed his bulging suitcase in a part of one of the shacks assigned to their Patrol; and then they hurried

towards the dining hall at one end of the largest shack, known as the Headquarters cabin.

There were two long tables in the dining hall, each illumined by a number of freshly lighted white candles stuck on to the rough boards. Overhead an old-fashioned brass oil lamp hung from the ceiling, shedding its somewhat faint light upon the group of boys gathering at the tables. The pungent aroma of steaming baked beans filled the room, mingling pleasantly with the faint odor of wood smoke from the bulging sheet-iron stove in the middle of the room. Gay laughter, boisterous shouts and friendly, good-natured jostlings kept the candle flames in continual motion, causing the wax to burn unevenly.

Rodney and Frank were the last to enter the hall. Cries of "Hey, you fellows — over here!" greeted them. Feet shuffled on the floor, and there was a shifting of bodies on the benches along the two tables. Dicky Dover stood up and waved his hand; he was a small boy, but he had a big voice. "Here's two places!" he

shouted. "Come on, Rod! Come on, Frank! I saved these just for you!"

They sat down between Dicky and a dark-eyed boy named Harold Chubb. Four of the boys brought in the food from the adjoining kitchen — big steaming pans of baked beans, metal pitchers of hot cocoa, plates containing bread and cubes of yellow cheese, and a couple of small wicker baskets heaped high with crisp doughnuts. The clatter of forks and spoons began at once, and the conversation lost some of its boisterous animation. The big thing of the moment was food. Nothing else seemed to matter!

"Like Boston on a Saturday night!" observed Frank O'Connor, grinning at Rodney. "Everybody eats baked beans there on Saturday night — and if there's any left over, they eat 'em for breakfast Sunday morning. Frugal New England, you know!"

Rodney laughed. He had often heard his mother speak of Boston, sometimes with a note of longing for the city where she had spent her early girlhood. He turned abruptly to Harold

Chubb. "Did — did any mail come in this afternoon?"

"Mail?" repeated the other. "Listen to him, Frank! Just arrived, and he's asking for mail!"

"Expect a letter from your girl, Rod?" another boy demanded from across the table. "Gosh, she must think a lot of you —"

"Cheer up, Rod," added Harold, grinning over the top of his cup. "You've earned your letter — basketball! Get the point?"

"I get it," said Rodney.

The beans were disappearing rapidly — more rapidly doubtless than they were disappearing even in the big eastern city they had helped to make famous. The bread, the cheese, the cocoa, and the doughnuts, too, were becoming less and less conspicuous; and with the rapid disappearance of the food, conversation became more animated again — and the chief topic, as before, was the basketball game. Rodney and Frank and their teammates, and also the Scouts who had accompanied them to Middleton, found themselves assailed by a multitude of questions. Georgeburgh had come from behind to win;

that was what the fellow at the newspaper office had told George Cole — but he did n't say how far behind. Fifteen points? Whew! Say, how did lanky Baker play for Middleton? Did he pull off any of his long shots? And who made the most baskets for Georgeburgh? Were there many fouls called?

In the midst of the bombardment Mr. Fisher rose in his place at the other table. Every one had finished eating now, and the wavering candle flames and the pale golden rays from the hanging lamp gleamed and glistened on empty plates and cups. The Scoutmaster picked up a spoon and rapped for silence against one of the pitchers. Gradually the noise subsided.

"Well, boys," Mr. Fisher began with a smile, "basketball appears for the moment to be King, to judge by the conversation! All I've heard, ever since I arrived, is talk about the great game at Middleton this afternoon. It was a great game! I wish you all might have seen it. To me, and I am sure to every one who witnessed the game, Georgeburgh looked decisively beaten at the end of the first half. Then a

sort of miracle happened: the team rallied and, by stubborn team play, succeeded in pulling victory out of the fire. I think there 's a lesson in that for all of us, and I leave the thought with you to digest along with all the beans you 've eaten!"

He turned to Rodney and, with a twinkle in his eyes, said, "Scout Owen, as captain of the winning team, perhaps you will be willing to say a few words to us? I 'm sure that some of us won't be able to sleep to-night unless we learn just how the miracle was accomplished!"

Rodney moistened his lips, feeling suddenly warm and uncomfortable. He heard a disconcerting murmur of voices all round him and saw Bill Zimmerman grinning at him across the table; he was aware of Dicky Dover leaning eagerly towards him, his eyes bright, his lips parted expectantly. With an effort Rodney rose to his feet.

"Why — to tell the truth, Mr. Fisher," he began, "I — I 'm afraid I have n't much of anything to say. Of course we 're terribly pleased to have won. It — it was a clean, hard-fought

game all the way through, and Middleton had a great team —"

He paused, and some one shouted, "How 'd you come back so hard in the second half?"

Rodney grinned self-consciously. "I don't know," he replied. "We just did!" And he sank, confused, into his seat amid a tumult of laughter.

Frank O'Connor sprang to his feet. "Mr. Fisher!" he shouted. "I can tell the fellows what they want to know!"

"You tell 'em, Frank!" came a number of laughing voices.

The Scoutmaster nodded, and O'Connor raised his hand for silence, even as one of his ancestors may have done in the Irish Nationalist Party. From the same ancestor, too, may have come Frank's natural gift for oratory.

"Here 's how we did it!" he began in a loud, clear voice. "At the end of the first half four of us were licked; all we could talk about was hard luck and the size of the final score. But Rod here made us snap out of it! He took us each by the back of the neck and bumped our

heads together — I don't mean he actually did; you 'd have heard a noise like dumb bells if he had! But he talked to us good and peppy. He talked to us the way a Yale coach is supposed to talk to the Bulldog when the mutt's ears are all chewed and he 's sore from being rubbed in the mud. Why, Rod even quoted Foch to us! Remember that lecture on General Foch we heard at one of our big meetings last year? Remember the speaker read something Foch had written — and Foch said, 'Victory 's a thing of the will', and, 'If you won't be beat you can't be beat' — or something like that. Well, Rod showed us that fifteen points was n't such a big lead if we remembered our Foch; and then — well, then we went out and did what Foch did to the Germans and what the Yale bulldog often does to Harvard and Princeton."

"I 'll say you did!" some one shouted.

"Yes," continued O'Connor, becoming suddenly very earnest, "but everybody who saw the game knows we could n't have won without Rod's playing. He started things by knocking our heads together, and he kept us from getting

downhearted when Middleton began to score; but, say, you ought to have seen the way he himself played! You ought to have seen that last goal he made — whew! Both feet off the floor, and the two guards right beside him, and the basket nearly behind him, and he tearing along as if he were late for breakfast! Honest, fellows, I think he must have shot that goal with his ear! Anyhow, it looked that way to me! You know Rod expects to go to Annapolis when he 's through at high school. Well, all I have to say is, if he 's as good with one of those big naval guns as he is with a basketball, I 'd hate to be the target!"

Cheers and shouts of laughter rose from the tables as O'Connor sat down. The excitement continued for several minutes, and then the boys got up with a noisy scraping of feet and benches.

Later in the evening Rodney left his companions, who still lingered in the mess hall, where Harold Chubb was demonstrating sleight-of-hand tricks, and went to the shack that his Patrol was to occupy. He wanted to write a letter to his

"Everybody who saw the game knows we could n't have won without Rod's playing."

mother; he was so happy, so eager to tell her about the great victory, that he felt unable to wait until morning. He knew how keenly she had followed the progress of the team and how delighted she would be to learn all about the game. He was alone in the little shack, but now and again he could hear the shouts of his companions in the mess hall. He stuffed a few sticks of wood into the little stove at the end of the room, lit a candle and placed it on the window ledge; then seating himself upon his cot, he opened his suitcase and drew forth a pad of paper. He had hardly begun the letter when the bulky figure of the Scoutmaster appeared in the doorway.

"Hello, Rodney — just thought I 'd drop in for a few moments, if you 're not too busy —"

"Come in, Mr. Fisher! No, I 'm not too busy — just writing a letter." He moved over on the cot, and the Scoutmaster sat down beside him.

"It 's been quite a big day for you, Rodney."

"Yes, Mr. Fisher." Rodney smiled. "Seems I could n't wait another minute before writing

to my mother about it. She 's so interested, you know, in what I do; and she 's been especially interested in the basketball games this year. She 'll be as happy as I am that Georgeburgh won!"

Mr. Fisher nodded understandingly. "So you expect to enter Annapolis? I had n't heard about that until Frank O'Connor mentioned it to-night."

"Yes, if I can get the appointment."

"Why the Navy?" inquired Mr. Fisher. "That is, why the Navy rather than the Army or some other career?"

"Well, it 's like this, sir," replied Rodney. "I 'm not terribly studious. Law or medicine or even business does n't appeal to me. I want something more active, and — well, there 's a lot of sea water in my blood."

Mr. Fisher raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"It 's all on my mother's side," Rodney went on. "Her people were Yankees, and most of them followed the sea — the men folks, I mean. We 've talked a lot about them, Mother and I, and — well, it 's sort of got hold of me. I hon-

estly feel I could n't really ever be happy unless I followed the sea somehow."

Mr. Fisher remained silent for some time. At last he said, "What does your mother think about your choice of a career?"

"Oh, she approves," was the reply. "It was she who first mentioned the Naval Academy to me. In the beginning I just had the idea of going into the merchant marine, just following the sea, you know, the way my Yankee ancestors did; but my mother seemed to think I 'd do better in the Navy. She told me she would n't be happy just having me do anything; she wants me to be somebody. And she said, as long as I was bent on following the sea, I ought to aim first at Annapolis. I was enthusiastic over the idea, and when Mother saw that, she said she 'd help me prepare for the exams." Rodney smiled and added, "She knows I 'm not much when it comes to studying."

"Your mother never encouraged you to follow some other calling?"

"Not after she saw how eager I was to enter the Navy," replied Rodney. "You know, Mr.

Fisher, my father has been dead a long time; I can just barely remember him. I think his life is in a great measure responsible for my mother's attitude toward the work I plan to undertake. My father never was really very happy, I 'm afraid. He wanted to be a doctor, but he had to go to work at an early age, and finally he drifted into business. He never liked it, and he did n't do especially well at it; Mother says he was always talking about what he might have been if he could have gone to medical school. And the funny thing is, his own father, and I think his grandfather, too, were just the same way; they were in something and wanted to be in something else. It seems odd, does n't it? On my mother's side of the family the men followed the sea and were happy; on my father's side they were discontented because they were doing things they were n't fitted for."

Mr. Fisher was silent again for a long while. Then he put a hand on Rodney's shoulder and said, "What you 've told me, Rodney, interests me deeply. I, too, once had the urge to become a naval officer, but there were obstacles in the

way, and I let them beat me. All my life I 've regretted it! Misfits are among our most common tragedies — and I was a misfit in the business I entered. I am still a misfit, I 'm afraid, as a teacher of mathematics — but I 've had to make the best of it. Scouting, which I took up during the war, has helped me beyond measure, but as long as I live I shall always regret that I failed to surmount the obstacles that lay between me and a naval career. Whatever happens, Rodney, don't let trivial obstacles stand in the way of your ambition! Tell me," he added, "is your mother well equipped for helping you with the examinations you 'll have to take?"

"Oh, yes," Rodney replied. "I 'm pretty lucky that way. You know, Mother used to teach school, and she 's planning to begin again next fall. In fact, she 's over at Hartsdale right now to see about a certain position that 's open. You know Mr. Parker? He 's quite prominent in educational work in the state."

"Mr. Vinton Parker? Yes, I 've heard of him."

"Well, his wife is a friend of my mother's, and she 's been wanting Mother to come and pay her a visit. They have a fine place over at Hartsdale. Well, Mother went last Monday, and she plans to stay for another week —" He was abruptly silent. Once more the besetting anxiety over his mother was upon him; the doubts that he had reasoned away seemed to return now with greater force.

"You and your mother are all alone here in Ohio, is n't that so?" inquired the Scoutmaster.

Rodney nodded absently. Then with an impulsive movement he said, "Mr. Fisher, I — I 'm sort of worried about my mother. Maybe it 's silly to worry — I suppose it is — but I have n't heard from her since she left. It seems strange she should n't have written."

"Oh, there may be good reason for that, Rodney. Little, unimportant things often keep us from writing letters."

"Yes, but —" Rodney's tongue seemed suddenly very dry. After a few moments he continued, unable any longer to hold back the thing that was at the base of all his anxiety: "One

day last winter I heard our neighbor, Mrs. Heath, make some remark about my mother's going to the hospital. I don't remember just exactly what she said, but it scared me. I spoke to Mother about it, but she only laughed and said Mrs. Heath had a bad habit of talking too much. Well, now, when I didn't get a letter —"

"Oh, come!" exclaimed Mr. Fisher, patting Rodney's shoulder affectionately. "I'm sure you're worrying needlessly. Why, as a matter of fact, there may be a letter for you at home at this moment! We left Georgeburgh before the first mail, did n't we? Well, then —"

He glanced upward as Dicky Dover thrust his head into the doorway. "Excuse me, Mr. Fisher, but you're wanted on the telephone. Somebody in Binghamville — they would n't let anybody else take the message — said they wanted you —"

"All right. Thanks." The Scoutmaster rose, adding, "Come along, Rodney, if you like, and we 'll finish our little talk."

They left the shack together and walked down the path toward the Headquarters cabin,

talking as they went. They passed the mess hall, where the noise had now subsided somewhat, and made their way round to a small room at the other end of the building. A pale stream of yellow light came from the partly open door. They entered, and Mr. Fisher crossed to the little table that held a lamp and a telephone instrument beside it.

"Hello. Yes, this is Mr. Fisher — a telegram? For Rodney Owen? Just a moment."

Rodney suddenly stiffened at the other end of the table, feeling as if an icy hand had closed round his heart. A telegram for him! Who would possibly send him a telegram, unless— Like a stab of pain, came the thought of his mother. Something had happened to his mother!

"All ready." The voice of the Scoutmaster broke the silence of the little room.

With fingers like ice, Rodney reached out and steadied himself against the table, staring at the instrument with a look of dread. He could hear the hum of the wire; it ceased abruptly as the Scoutmaster pressed the receiver closer to his ear.

"Yes." A pause, then, "Yes —"

Mr. Fisher was writing something on a pad of paper. Rodney watched the moving pencil, unable to stir from his place.

"What was that word? — Yes, I have it —"

Rodney's gaze moved from the paper and pencil. He noted the lamp at Mr. Fisher's elbow, the scorched, year-old moths hanging in forlorn clusters from the blackened chimney, a zigzag scratch that ran half the length of the table, a queer-shaped knot in the wood; then his gaze returned to the moving pencil and remained upon it, fascinated.

"Now would you repeat the whole message?"

Something in the Scoutmaster's tone caused Rodney's legs to waver under him. He stumbled against a broken camp chair near the table and clung to the back with both hands.

Mr. Fisher hung up the receiver and rose, holding the paper that he had torn from the pad. His hand trembled violently. There were great beads of perspiration on his forehead, and he seemed to breathe with difficulty. He moved to where Rodney was standing and put an arm round his shoulders.

"My mother —" The words came from the boy as a hoarse whisper.

"It is bad news, Rodney. You must prepare yourself for it." Mr. Fisher swallowed hard and then went on: "Your mother passed away this morning at the Hartsdale Hospital —"

A sense-deadening weight seemed suddenly to fall upon Rodney's shoulders. He took a step forward and sank upon the camp chair. He could hear the Scoutmaster's voice, but the words reached him only as a blur of sound. For a few seconds he just sat there, his lips parted, his eyes staring into space, his hands grasping the edge of the table. Then with a convulsive sob his head dropped forward upon his arms, and his shoulders shook with the unchecked violence of his grief.

CHAPTER II

ALONE IN THE WORLD

Rodney felt a hand upon his shoulder. It was a big hand, gentle, kindly, almost motherly in its caress. He lifted a tragic, tear-stained face toward Mr. Fisher. Infinite sympathy shone in the Scoutmaster's eyes; it caused the boy's grief to burst forth afresh, racking his body with sobs that he was powerless to control.

Mr. Fisher just stood there, silent, painfully aware of the futility of words; but there was mute eloquence in the caressing movements of his big hand. Once it lifted to smooth Rodney's rumpled brown hair; then it returned to the

shoulder, lightly stroking and patting it, reminding the boy far better than words could have reminded him that there were friends eager to help, eager to share his sorrow. An alarm clock on the wall above the table raucously ticked away the seconds. Muffled laughter trembled from the direction of the mess hall. The lamp flame flickered; the dead moths fluttered in the draft as if to free themselves from the hot, blackened glass.

Rodney lifted his head again and made a supreme effort to control himself. "Why — why was my mother — at the hospital?"

"She went there for an operation, apparently. She failed to recover. The message is from your neighbor, Mr. Heath. They are good people, Rodney, good neighbors; they want to help you —"

"Nobody can help me! Nobody can!" The words were broken, almost inarticulate. "Oh, if you 'd only known my mother, Mr. Fisher! If you 'd only known her —" Hot tears ran from his eyes — tears that blinded him. He pressed his hands against his face, then made as

if to rise, murmuring, "I can't stay here — I must go home."

"Yes, Rodney, you will soon be in Georgeburgh. I will look after everything. You can take the morning train."

"Oh," said Rodney in a bewildered manner. "Then I 'll have to stay here overnight ?"

"There are no more trains to-night. Morning will soon come, my boy."

Rodney got to his feet. The sound of laughter, louder now, came from the direction of the mess hall; it made him shudder. He remembered how only a short time before he, too, had been laughing, gay, happy — happier than ever in his life. With the Scoutmaster's arm round him, he walked to the door. The night air was like cool fingers against his face. Pools of moonlight lay in fantastic patterns under the trees, changing shape with the gently moving branches; and from somewhere far-off came the plaintive notes of a bird, wonderfully clear.

The tears filled his eyes again, and he turned to the Scoutmaster. "I want to be alone,

Mr. Fisher!" he pleaded. "Please, may I be alone?"

"Yes, surely. I 'll accompany you as far as your quarters; then I 'll leave you."

They walked along the path in silence — past the windows of the mess hall where happy, carefree boys were laughing and singing. Rodney walked as if in a dream. Everything seemed to him strange and unreal — everything except the grief that tore at his heart.

They paused in front of the little shack. The candle was still burning on the window ledge, and on one of the cots Frank O'Connor was seated cross-legged, spreading out his moist basketball apparel. Mr. Fisher entered and spoke to him in a low voice.

When the Scoutmaster came out, he pressed Rodney's hand. "Good night, my boy," he said unsteadily. "Try to sleep if you can. And remember, there's nothing I won't do to help you! You know that, don't you?"

Rodney nodded and stumbled forward into the shack.

Frank O'Connor was on his feet, staring

helplessly at the floor. He lifted his head and tried to speak, but no sound issued from his lips. At last he crossed to Rodney's cot and drew down the blankets.

Rodney removed his shoes and, dropping upon the cot, buried his face in the pillow. Before him in the blackness rose the vision of his mother. He saw her as she had appeared to him on the morning she had left for Hartsdale — a slim, girlish-looking woman with brown hair and blue, laughing eyes and lips that seemed made only for smiles. Sobs shook him again as he remembered her parting words: "Take good care of yourself, won't you, while I 'm away?" And now she was gone! Never again would he hear her laughter, the music of her voice!

Frank O'Connor gently drew the blankets up around his companion's shoulders. Then he tiptoed to the doorway and sat down upon the flooring. A few minutes later Ed Brown and Harold Chubb came strolling arm in arm toward the shack, singing a rollicking camp song. O'Connor sprang to his feet and hurried out to meet them, and the song broke off abruptly.

As from a great distance Rodney heard his companions enter, heard occasional words spoken in subdued voices, then the sound of beds being opened and clothing being removed. The silver notes of a bugle came trembling across the night air. He listened, temporarily forgetting his grief. The bugler was playing taps. Rodney suddenly began to sob again; the notes were so sweet, so sad, so plaintive! As the final note died away, a hush seemed to settle over the camp — a hush broken only by the soothing whisper of the wind among the trees.

At last Rodney fell asleep.

Mr. Fisher was at the shack the next morning when Rodney awoke. He said he had telephoned to town, and that a bus would be out in sufficient time for him to catch the first train to Georgeburgh. "I think some one ought to go along home with you," he added; "and if you don't mind, I should like to accompany you, myself."

But Rodney shook his head. "I 'd rather go alone, Mr. Fisher," he replied. "I don't mean

to be ungrateful, but somehow I — I want to be alone."

"Very well, Rodney."

"I — I 've got to get used to being alone," Rodney added in a choking voice.

After a meager breakfast in the kitchen he began to gather his equipment together. Frank O'Connor had lost all his native gift for speech, but he was able to help Rodney with his preparations for departure and to show in many little ways how deeply he felt for his companion. It was the same with all the others. Awkward, silent, and awed in the face of sorrow, they expressed in their actions what they were unable to express in words — fastening the straps on Rodney's suitcase, brushing the dust from a sweater, smoothing out the wrinkles in his hat.

The parting was an ordeal for every one. When the bus arrived, Rodney tried to smile as he shook hands with some of his companions; but there was a tension in the air, and he felt that if he had to speak, he must break down and weep like a child. Frank O'Connor was the last to press his hand. As he did so, he mur-

mured brokenly, "Gee! Rod, I wish I could help you!" and then turned away abruptly.

Mr. Fisher rode with Rodney to the station and procured the ticket for him; and when the train arrived, he took the boy's hand in a friendly, paternal grasp. "Good-by, Rodney! Remember, if there 's anything I can do for you —" He was suddenly overcome with emotion, unable to go on.

"I 'll never forget how kind you 've been to me, Mr. Fisher!" replied Rodney. "The same with the fellows — please — please, tell them for me!"

He swung aboard the car and, with under lip clenched hard between his teeth, walked down the aisle and dropped into the first vacant seat. There, unable to hold his emotion in check any longer, he slumped forward in the big red plush seat and sobbed as he had sobbed the night before. The train started with a jerk; objects began to move past the window; the wheels clicked against the rail ends, at first slowly, then with increasing rapidity. And Rodney remained slumped forward in the big seat. He was alone

— alone in the world, a world that seemed without sunlight, without hope.

He reached Georgeburgh late in the afternoon — a quiet Sunday afternoon — and went direct to the home of the Heaths. Mrs. Heath, a stout, fair-haired, motherly woman of perhaps fifty, received him with a simple and touching tenderness.

"You 'll stay right here with me an' Mr. Heath," she said after the first few minutes. "This 'll be your home, Rodney, until things sort o' settle themselves. John, he says he won't have a boy who 's just lost his mother stay all alone, even if it is just next door — an' I say so, too! Oh, but your mother was a fine woman, Rodney! What a pity she had to be taken — but, there! Let me make a cup o' tea for you!"

Shortly before supper Mr. Heath came home from a day's fishing. He had made a fine catch and was in a jovial mood as he entered the house; but at sight of Rodney, sitting on the parlor sofa, all his good cheer seemed suddenly to fall from him. He hesitated in the hallway — a short, slim man with kindly brown eyes and

an unruly wisp of gray hair across his forehead. His fingers smoothed the lock back awkwardly. He moistened his lips and drew his hand across his mouth. Then with hesitating steps he entered the room. Rodney rose, and Mr. Heath shook his hand in a limp manner.

"You 've had a great loss, Rodney — a great loss."

"Yes, Mr. Heath."

"Well, try an' not to let it sort o' upset ye too much." The words, if poorly expressed, were well meant. "We 'll keep ye right here with us long 's ye want to stay. That 's what I said to Ella, and she 's of my mind, Ella is." He paused and stared at the carpet; then suddenly brightening, he added, "Come an' see the mess o' fish I caught!"

Rodney remained with the Heaths despite his longing for solitude; they insisted, and he could not bring himself to the point of protesting. From Mrs. Heath he learned something of the nature of his mother's illness — an internal disorder that had necessitated an immediate

operation even though it was known that her heart was weak.

The funeral took place the next day. When it was over, Rodney went to the little room that he occupied in the Heath cottage and sat down in a chair beside the window. This was the most acute point of his suffering. He had passed the stage of tears; he could only sit and stare out the window at the gray sky, at the dingy backs of the houses in the street beyond, at the clothes flapping on the lines. Memories of his mother wandered through his mind, torturing him by their very sweetness. With her death everything seemed to have gone, everything that was worth living for, leaving him with a sense of overwhelming solitude and desolation. He remembered his words to Mr. Fisher, who had come down from camp to attend the funeral. "I 've nothing left to live for!" he had said on the way home from the cemetery.

"I know it must seem that way to you now, Rodney," the man had replied. "But you remember, don't you, what you told me? You told me about your ambition to enter Annapolis.

It was also your mother's ambition; and, my boy, you have that to live for — the fulfillment of her wish."

The words had had a sobering effect upon Rodney; but after a few minutes he said, "I 'm alone in the world now. I 'll have to go to work. I — I 'm not very studious, you know, and I don't see how I can ever make a showing in the examinations for Annapolis. O Mr. Fisher!" he added miserably. "I 'm not good for anything! I 'm not equipped to make my own way in the world! I — I —" His voice quavered, and he was unable to complete the thought.

"You have your Scout training, Rodney," replied Mr. Fisher. "It will help you, I 'm sure, in solving the many new problems that will confront you."

Rodney continued to meditate before the window. Rain was falling now, streaking the dusty panes of glass and pattering upon the roof overhead. His thoughts turned again to his mother. Oh, if he could only see her once more! If he could only hear the sound of her voice! He pressed his hands against his eyes and tried to

convince himself that everything was merely a dream, a horrible nightmare from which he must soon awaken. But when he removed his hands, there were the same dingy backs of the houses in the next street, the same gray sky, the same clothes flapping on the lines.

A knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," said Rodney in a dull voice.

Mrs. Heath entered with hesitating steps; in her hand she held an envelope. "It 's a letter for you, Rodney," she said. "It 's from your mother. It was in another envelope, sent from the hospital. There was a note with it, from your mother. She said I was to give it to you if — if —"

Rodney was on his feet. He took the envelope from Mrs. Heath's plump hand, and when she had gone out, he walked to the window again and sat down. For several minutes he remained with the envelope between his fingers, noting his name in the neat, familiar writing of his mother, hesitating, he hardly knew why, to break the seal. At last, with his knife, he slit the envelope

carefully and drew the letter forth, spreading it out gently.

It was a long letter covering several pages and was written with blue-black ink. A lump came into his throat as he began to read:

"My dearest Rodney: You must try to be calm when you read this letter, as I am trying, oh, so hard, to be while I write it. I am ill, Rodney, and must undergo an immediate operation. I have known for some time that one day it must come to this, and I had planned for it within the year. Alas for my plans! I will not go into painful details — the operation must take place to-morrow.

"I am at the hospital now, and I am trying to be brave — but somehow I feel I shall not come through the ordeal. The doctors are very kind, and they tell me there 's a good chance of recovery; but I feel they are just trying to cheer me up. Still, they may be right, and I would not cause you alarm by a hasty and perhaps unnecessary summons — no, even though I long with all my soul to

have you near me at this time! But enough of me and my troubles.

"O my dearie, it breaks my heart to think that you may have to read this! It is more than I can bear to think of you grieving for me — to think of you alone, forced to give up precious boy interests so dear to you and face the world without father or mother to help —"

The final words were pale and blurred as if by tears that had fallen upon them. There was a space, and then the message continued. The paper shook in Rodney's fingers:

"In the past hours, Rodney, you have been constantly in my thoughts. I have tried as best I can to arrange things so that, if the worst comes to the worst, you may make the best possible start in your new life. Alas, I can do so little, so very, very little! You know we have never had much money; the small amount you will receive would not keep you for long — and yet, oh, how much I want you to continue your schooling and one day

achieve the dream that is so dear to both of us — our dream of Annapolis!

"With that thought in mind, Rodney, I have written another letter, which will be put in the mail if 'the worst comes to the worst.' I have written to your Uncle Jonathan Eldred, in Boston, telling him about you. Although he is an old man and a bachelor, I have asked him to take you, Rodney, to help you in this most critical period of a boy's life. He will do it, I know; he is well able to do so — and his heart is kind. Go to him, Rodney, to his home on dear old Beacon Street, since you cannot remain in Georgeburgh. Go to him and accept his kindness. Do not let pride stand in your way. One day you will be able to repay him, I know. O Rodney, my dearest boy, to think I should be writing to you like this!"

Again there were blurs upon the page — blurs that brought sobs from Rodney's throat. After a few minutes he read the last paragraphs:

"Just a final word, Rodney. It is a new

world that opens before you. God grant my boy will not find it too unkind! That he will not allow it to break his spirit, to destroy his ideals, to conquer him as it has conquered so many others! You remember how often we have discussed the Scouts together? Be a 'good Scout', Rodney — always! And never forget the Scout Oath, with its Three Points of Honor, as I like to think of them.

"And now, good-by, Rodney, my dearest boy! Think of me always as somewhere above, watching over you. And, O Rodney, try to smile when you think of me! Try, try to be happy! I would not have you sad.

"Your ever loving
"Mother."

Rodney buried his face in his arms while again the tears flowed — not convulsively this time, but gently, almost soothingly, like a stream that has passed beyond the rapids. The rain continued to patter upon the roof and to tinkle against the window panes. Twilight began to

close in. Patches of yellow gleamed here and there in the houses opposite.

A week or so later Rodney received a letter from Jonathan Eldred, written in an old man's shaky handwriting. It was charged with sympathy and kindliness, and in almost every paragraph the writer expressed his deep regret at being unable to be with his sister once more before she died, or to attend her funeral. The letter left no doubt as to his feelings toward his nephew, whom he had never seen. Rodney must come to Boston, where he could continue his education at one of the schools there. He must try henceforth to think of his old bachelor-uncle as a sort of second father, who would do all in his power to fulfill the last wishes of his sister — to provide a home for her son during the critical years of his life. The address at the bottom of the paper was not Beacon Street, but a number on Pinckney Street.

It was not until late in September that affairs were settled so that Rodney could leave Georgeburgh. Meanwhile he continued to live with the Heaths. Every one was kind, wonderfully

kind! Mr. Fisher personally took charge of disposing of the furniture and household effects; and a number of Rodney's companions, fellow Scouts who lived in Georgeburgh or in the neighboring towns, made themselves useful in many ways. Among them was Frank O'Connor, whose sympathy and solicitude were always apparent.

On one occasion he ventured to ask Rodney about his plans for the future.

Rodney told him of his Uncle Jonathan and then added, "I suppose, once I get settled, I 'll just sort of go on the way I 've been doing here — enter one of the Boston high schools and — and just sort of go on."

"Sure, you can join one of the Scout Troops there," O'Connor suggested.

Rodney's face brightened momentarily.

"Yes, I ought to do that," he replied.

"And you still mean to enter Annapolis?"

Rodney nodded. "Yes, Frank. You see, my mother wanted me to. It — it was her last wish."

"You 'll make a great officer, Rod!"

Rodney smiled at his friend's enthusiasm.

Annapolis seemed to him very far off — a doubtful goal with few attractions. His mother's death was still too close to him; beside his great loss, all other things were drab, without the power to stir him. Yet deep within him was the feeling that, in spite of everything, he must continue to live, force himself to do things that no longer interested him — "just sort of go on."

On the first Monday in October, Rodney looked at his native Georgeburgh for the last time. Until the moment when his train drew out of the station he had not quite realized how much he cared for the little town with its broad, straight streets, its wide-spreading clusters of new houses, its general air of happy progress. Now he was on his way to make his home in a large and strange eastern city — a city that was already old before Georgeburgh was built — a conservative city with a history and an atmosphere all its own. At a normal time the prospect might have thrilled him; now he contemplated it with uneasiness.

Memories of old friends filled his mind as the train gathered headway — Mr. and Mrs. Heath

standing in the doorway, both protesting at the small sum he had slipped into the good woman's hand at the final moment; Mr. Fisher waving to him from the platform of the station; Frank O'Connor coming to him the evening before with a book to read on the train; Ed Brown and Paul Stearns and several other boys who had come to bid him good-by. Other memories passed before his mind — memories, yes, only memories from which he was drawing farther and farther away. And greatest of all was the memory of her who had meant so much to him! It seemed for a fleeting moment as if she were with him again, as if he could hear her speak the words at the end of the pathetic letter she had written:

"Never forget the Scout Oath, with its Three Points of Honor. . . . Think of me always as somewhere above, watching over you. . . . And, O Rodney, try to smile when you think of me!"

He did try to smile, although the tears brimmed his eyes. Then at last, leaning forward, he opened the lid of his black, patent-

leather suitcase and drew forth his worn copy of the handbook for Boy Scouts. He spread it out on his knees and with quivering lips read the Scout Oath, "the Three Points of Honor:"

> "On my honor I will do my best: To do my duty to God and my Country, and to obey the Scout Law; To help other people at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

And then he scanned the twelve items of the Scout Law, murmuring, "A Scout is trustworthy — loyal — helpful — friendly — courteous — kind — obedient — cheerful — thrifty — brave — clean — and reverent."

He closed the book again and stared into space. Yes, he would do his best! A new and unaccustomed life awaited him there to the east — a life of uncertainty, of disappointments perhaps. But he would strive to take his place in it with honor, to do his best — always!

CHAPTER III

A NEW LIFE BEGINS

The east wind was blowing. It swept in, chill and damp, from Boston Harbor, carrying with it a thick, heavy gray mass of unbroken cloud. Rain fell in a fine drizzle, and the odor of the sea was in the air.

Rodney, clad in a blue suit, a brown soft hat and a khaki rain coat, paused on the sidewalk outside the South Station, his chin lifted, his nostrils quivering, his whole being unaccountably stirred by the odor all about him — his first breath of the sea. The clerk at the information desk had told him he must go to Park Street: "Take the subway or follow Summer Street up

the hill." Rodney decided to walk and save the carfare. Turning up the collar of his rain coat and shifting his suitcase to the other hand, he made his way to the curb.

In front of him stretched a wide square, with a dark, dripping elevated structure cutting across it and a disconcerting number of narrow streets opening out beyond. Two of them led slightly uphill, and he knew that one must be Summer Street. People gathered beside him on the curb. Trucks and speeding motor cars roared and splashed in front of him, their horns sounding harshly on the mist-laden air. Trolley cars clanged their bells, and an elevated train swept with a grinding rush overhead.

The whistle of the traffic policeman in the center of the square screamed above all other sounds, and Rodney started across. In a few moments he was in the midst of a hurrying throng of people — men and women in rubbers and rain coats of various colors. Nearly everybody seemed to be carrying umbrellas — black ones, green ones, blue ones, red ones, most of them conventional in shape, some almost flat

Rodney paused, his being stirred by the odor about him — his first breath of the sea.

like the top of a mushroom. And in the streets leading down the hill he could see an endless double stream of them bobbing about, glistening in the rain.

Reaching the other side of the square, he was soon on his way up Summer Street between gray, smoke-stained buildings that housed quick-lunch restaurants, music shops, radio-supply shops, delicatessens — little shops of all kinds. The umbrellas swarmed about him on the narrow sidewalk, growing more numerous; he was obliged constantly to jerk his head away from the protruding points. Automobiles parked along the curb made the street seem narrower than it really was. Rodney walked with short steps behind the slowly moving umbrellas. He observed now that many persons carried leather bags — brief cases, flat or bulging, or plain "Boston bags" with two handles close together and a single strap between them.

Such was Rodney's first impression of the city in which he was to make his home — leather bags and umbrellas, rain coats and rubbers,

narrow, crowded streets, and a cold east wind that loosed the rain in a fine drizzle.

Ahead of him, above the tops of the umbrellas, he had a sudden glimpse of open sky, of trees with yellow, bedraggled autumn foliage and part of a broad white and red-brick building surmounted by a shining golden dome. From a guide book that he had bought at the station he knew that this was the State House, and that between it and the head of Summer Street — which, curiously enough, had now become Winter Street — lay Boston Common.

Viewing the Common for the first time, Rodney felt a swift sense of pleasure and freedom. He had not expected to find so large an open stretch in the very heart of the city — a well-kept park with paths and benches, a small pond and a great many old trees with long, graceful branches and golden foliage. He crossed the street toward one of several subway entrances on one corner of the Common. A large flock of pigeons was moving about on the wet cement sidewalk, pecking at pieces of popcorn that some one had thrown there. They seemed quite

without fear, wisely moving aside for people who were hurrying toward the subway, but making no attempt to fly. Other pigeons were perched on top of the subway entrances, and still others in the tower of a church just across the street.

The clock in the tower showed almost noon. Rodney walked along one of the paths and, choosing a bench, sat down. He did not mind the rain or the chill wind ; the thrill of adventure was upon him. He felt a certain strange pleasure in the thought that among all the people who were hurrying along the streets that bordered the Common, there was not one whom he knew, and that in the whole population of Boston he had only one friend — his old uncle whom he had never seen.

He drew the guide book from his pocket and spread out the map that was in the back of it. He was soon able to orient himself — Park Street with its church there in front of him, Tremont Street on his right and Beacon Street on his left, up the hill. Pinckney Street was only two streets beyond Beacon and after a few minutes he rose and set off toward it.

The house in which Jonathan Eldred lived was built of dark red brick, like the houses on either side of it — a plain, unadorned dwelling, rather shabby, rather gloomy. It seemed to Rodney hardly the kind of place he would choose to live in if he were well-to-do and a bachelor. He entered the vestibule and hesitated before the single bell that met his eyes, feeling suddenly ill at ease. Supposing, after all, his uncle were not so cordial as his letter had indicated? He frowned at the door bell; it was the old-fashioned kind that you pull toward you. He reached forth abruptly and pulled it. Then he waited, shifting now to one foot, now to the other, feeling that everything depended on the manner in which his uncle greeted him for the first time. Footsteps sounded within. Then the door opened a foot or so, and he saw the face of a woman against the darkness.

"What is it you want?" she asked.

"I — I want to see Mr. Eldred — "

"He lives on the top floor at the back." The door opened wider.

"Oh," said Rodney, "then he does n't occupy this whole house?"

"No," was the dry response. "Go up the stairs. You 'll find his door right ahead of you on the top floor."

Rodney thanked her and started up the stairway. At the top he paused before a dark panelled door, and again he experienced the doubts and misgivings that had assailed him in the vestibule. He knocked and stepped backward. Some one stirred beyond the door, and a voice, a soft, quavering voice, called, "Come!"

Rodney turned the knob and pushed the door open. The first thing he saw was an enormous sheet of yellow paper spread out upon a table beside a window. At the table sat an old man with silvery white hair that reached almost to his shoulders; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles over which he was peering at his visitor. He pushed himself stiffly to his feet, still staring; then with hands outstretched and a smile of welcome wrinkling his face, he took several quick steps toward the door.

"Rodney! How glad I am to see you!"

He clasped his nephew's hand in both of his, murmuring, "Yes, it 's her boy — same blue eyes and brown hair, same chin and high cheek bones — same way of holding his head a little on one side — Rodney, my dear boy, how very glad I am to see you!"

Touched to the heart by the genuine warmth of the old man's welcome, Rodney could only mumble, "I 'm glad to see you, Uncle Jonathan!"

"Well, well! Take off your things and sit down. Make yourself right at home! This is your home, Rodney — yours and mine together. We 'll get along, you and I, like — like two boys!" A high-pitched chuckle came from his pale lips. In spite of Rodney's protest, he took the suitcase and led the way to an adjoining room, adding, "This will be your room, Rodney. I hope you 'll like it. There 's the wash room right handy. I s'pose you 'll want to wash after your long ride. If there 's anything you need, just call me."

Alone in the room that was to be his own, Rodney gazed about him. It was a small room with a single enameled bed, a bureau, a couple of

cane-bottom chairs and a low window that looked out upon the backs of the houses in the next street.

Five minutes later he and his uncle sat together in the living room of the small suite, and Rodney talked of his mother and of their former life in Georgeburgh.

When he spoke of her desire for him to continue his studies for the purpose of one day entering Annapolis, Uncle Jonathan nodded emphatically and said: "Yes, yes, you must do that, Rodney! But you won't be the first in the family to take to the sea. A great many seafaring men among the Eldreds — look here." And he drew the sheet of yellow paper toward him from the table. Rodney noted that it was covered with radiating lines and arcs, and that the spaces between were for the most part filled with names and dates written in ink.

"There," continued the old man, putting a finger on one of the names, "there 's your Grandfather Seth Eldred; he followed the sea almost to the day of his death — a deep-sea fisherman, he was. And there 's his father — also a fisher-

man." The finger moved here and there on the chart, pointing out the names of various Eldreds and their kin who in one way or another had gained a livelihood from the sea. "You 'll be the first naval man in the family, Rodney!" he added with a smile.

"I s'pose you wonder why I made this genealogical chart," he went on, noting the look of curiosity in his nephew's eyes. "Well, it 's just an old man's pastime; that 's all, just a pastime. I gave up working some years ago — the woolen business, you know. I s'pose your mother told you I did — er — pretty well at it?" His eyes suddenly lifted — pale blue eyes that seemed to search the boy's face anxiously.

Rodney nodded. "Yes, my mother spoke to me of that." His glance wandered about the room — at the worn ingrain carpet, at the imitation mahogany book case in one corner, at the old chairs, the green plush sofa that sagged in the middle, the faded gray wall paper, the tarnished frame of the oval mirror beside the door.

Uncle Jonathan moistened his lips and, after

another anxious glance at his nephew's face, went on quickly, "Up to about a year ago I used to live yonder on Beacon Street, but I thought 'twas time I made a change. I like it here, because it 's so quiet — and it 's up high. Then, too, I like these three little rooms here. What right has an old bachelor like me to live in a place that 's big enough for a whole family? Where I lived before was nice and sunny, and a pleasant view across the Common and the Public Garden, but it 's better here, up high — much better in every way!"

There was something in his uncle's manner that puzzled Rodney, but he gave it no more than a passing thought. At last Uncle Jonathan suggested that it was time they had lunch.

They went to the New England Kitchen, on Charles Street, at the foot of the hill — a place where conservatism seemed to be the rule. Rodney noted the dark, severe woodwork, the plain oak tables and paper napkins, the general atmosphere of old-time respectability that marked the place in all its details. It was apparent also in many of the people who sat near

him — middle-aged and elderly men with shrewd, tired eyes and drooping moustaches and a look of learning and of aristocratic breeding about them; middle-aged and elderly women dressed in a manner considerably out of date, women obviously of strong personality and character. In such a place Uncle Jonathan Eldred, with his silver hair and black suit, seemed naturally to belong.

"Well, Rodney," he said when they were eating, "you will want to begin school next week. We have some good high schools here. What grade will you be in?"

"I completed my sophomore year back home," was the reply. "I suppose I 'll be a junior — only I 'll have to enter late, and that may make a difference."

Uncle Jonathan nodded thoughtfully. At last he cast his nephew another of those quick, anxious glances and said, "You 're sure you will be satisfied at a high school? Your mother — she did n't say anything to you about entering a private school?"

"Oh, no," replied Rodney. "No," he added,

"I would n't think of going to a school where you have to pay. I — I simply could n't do it! As it is, I — I feel somehow —"

"There, now," the old man interrupted him, "don't you worry the least bit about that."

"I 'll never forget your kindness!" murmured Rodney. Thereafter he was silent for a long time, stirred by a sudden and whole-hearted love for his old uncle.

The days that followed were a period of severe readjustment for Rodney. There were so many unaccustomed things that he must learn to accept as a matter of course. After some difficulty he was admitted to the junior class at high school, with various studies to make up; standards, it appeared, were higher in Boston than in Georgeburgh.

He set to work at once, determined to place himself on an equal footing with the rest of his class. But there were difficulties, greater difficulties than he had experienced in Georgeburgh. The newness of his life, the strangeness of his surroundings, the occasional moments when he could not rid himself of a feeling of utter hope-

lessness, all made it doubly hard for him to apply himself to his studies. Nor was his uncle able to be of much help; his education was limited, and his thoughts ran constantly to genealogy; he spent the greater part of each day at the New England Historic Genealogical Society near by, returning in the afternoon, tired but often triumphant over some bit of information that he had traced and verified.

But Rodney persisted, studying afternoons and evenings, giving little thought to anything except his school work; and by the end of the month he felt that he had accomplished the greater part of his task. It was a hard assignment, but it was also a blessing, serving as it did to keep his mind definitely occupied during the period of painful readjustment.

Meanwhile, he had begun to make friends at the high school. One of them, a member of the basketball squad, urged him to go out for basketball. Rodney had been wondering whether he could give the time to it; now, thanks to the urging of his friend, he went back into the game that he loved so much. At the

end of two weeks he was a regular forward on the second team. But basketball, with its long practice hours and hard-fought scrimmages, was not conducive to study. In the evenings he was tired and sleepy — too sleepy to give to his lessons the attention they demanded. His class work began to suffer; and at last, despite the protests of teammates and managers, he decided to play no more that year.

About that time Rodney made a new acquaintance. He was dining alone one Saturday noon at a small lunchroom near Pinckney Street, when a friendly voice said, "Do you mind if I sit here at your table?"

"Glad to have you!" replied Rodney, glancing up at a tall, dark-eyed boy perhaps a year or so older than he.

The other put his tray down and seated himself in the chair opposite. Rodney thought he had never seen any one with such fine curly black hair or a face so frank and friendly.

"Eat here often?" inquired the stranger, smiling.

"Once in a while. Got to eat somewhere."

"Me, too. Not a bad little joint, though, and it 's nice and handy to where I live. You live near here?"

"On Pinckney Street," replied Rodney, and he mentioned the number.

"That 's funny; we 're sort of neighbors. I live on Pinckney, too — down the hill, though, beyond Louisburg Square. I think I 've seen you once or twice — with an old man —"

"He 's my uncle."

"Is he? Fine-looking old man! Hope I look like that if I ever get so old! You work?"

"No, I 'm at high school. You at high, too?"

"No, I 'm at a private school. Went to high for a year back home in Fitchburg; then I came to Boston. My folks decided Dr. Masterson's little school over in the Back Bay was just the place for their ambitious son. Get along faster, you know — don't have to bother with stuff I don't need."

"What are you studying to be?" Rodney asked.

"For Annapolis," was the reply.

Rodney looked at him in surprise.

"What 's so funny?" demanded his companion.

"Why, the fact is, I want to go to Annapolis, too!"

"Do you? Say, that is funny that the two of us should meet here like this — future midshipmen! My name 's Ted Morris," he added, extending his hand impulsively across the table.

"Glad to know you! Mine 's Rodney Owen."

"When do you plan to take your exams?"

"Oh, not for several years, I guess," replied Rodney.

"I 'll be all set to pass a year from next February," said Ted.

They continued to talk as they ate. When they rose to go out, Ted said, "Drop in and see me any evening. I 've got a pretty good room — glad to have you! We ought to get better acquainted."

"You 're right," said Rodney. "I 'll certainly drop in on you sometime."

He returned home and tried to study, but his thoughts kept wandering to Ted Morris. What luck to happen upon a fellow who was

also going to Annapolis! Such a friendly, likable fellow, too! Ted was bright, that was clear; exams could n't scare him! Rodney frowned over his history book and tried to concentrate on the assignment for Monday, but his thoughts kept straying off. At last he rose and, putting on his hat, went out for a walk.

Beacon Hill fascinated him, had fascinated him from the first. It seemed to have a personality, a soul. Its sloping narrow streets with their dark red brick houses, its quaint doorways and alleyways, its sad ailanthus trees growing beside blank walls — one of them, in defiance of underwriters, growing up through the iron meshes of a fire escape; its unexpected vistas, its general air of cultured respectability, heightened by the panes of old lavender-colored glass in some of the windows — all combined with other and more subtle qualities to form a spell that was like a constant whispering of other days. On his own street, Pinckney, Oliver Wendell Holmes had once lived, and in a house farther along Thomas Bailey Aldrich had written his "Story of a Bad Boy." "This is the story of

a bad boy — well, not such a very, but a pretty bad, boy —" Rodney remembered the opening sentence of the book. Francis Parkman, the historian, had lived on Chestnut Street; so had Edwin Booth, the tragedian. Louisa M. Alcott and William Dean Howells had lived in Louisburg Square, and there in one of those old houses Jenny Lind, the singer, had been married.

When at last Rodney returned home, he found his uncle boiling a pan of water over a single-jet gas stove that he had connected to the central fixture in the living room. The old man looked surprised and disconcerted, but he recovered his poise after a few seconds.

"I just thought I'd like some tea and toast, Rodney, and I bought this little gas stove. It's nice and handy to make it right here in the room. You — you don't mind the smell of toast, do you?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Jonathan!"

Shortly after Thanksgiving, Rodney became interested in a Boy Scout Troop in the Back Bay. One of his classmates had told him about it and urged him to join. Rodney was eager to

take up his Scout activities again, feeling that to do so would be like returning to a part of his former happy life in Georgeburg. He spoke to his uncle about it one evening.

"I 'm afraid I 'm not very familiar with the Boy Scouts," observed the old man. "Does — does it cost much ?"

"Oh, no," said Rodney. "I would n't even have to bother about buying a uniform. I 've got everything."

There was a look of something like relief in Uncle Jonathan's eyes as he smiled at his nephew. "I see no reason why you should n't belong," he said. "You 'll have a good time, Rodney."

"Yes, uncle, and I 'm sure it won't interfere with my studies the way basketball did. I 'll be tickled to get back with the Scouts again !"

After supper he paid his first visit to the room of Ted Morris. Ted was delighted.

"Say, I was afraid you were n't ever going to come !" he exclaimed. "I was as lonesome as a stray dog this evening — was about to go to a movie or something desperate like that, and

then you popped in! First of all, let me show you my room." He drew himself erect and in an artificial voice proclaimed, "Against the north wall, ladies and gentlemen, you see Ted Morris' bed. On the east, his washstand, bookcase, and typewriter with two missing keys. On the west, the door he goes in and out of. On the south, his desk where he studies and writes a letter home once a week. Beyond the desk, the window affording an excellent view of the backs of the houses in the next street and half the homeless cats on Beacon Hill!"

He suddenly laughed and added, "I think there must be a bed of catnip out there somewhere! I never look out that window but I see at least three cats — two of them hurling insults at each other and the third sitting pretty, waiting to act as referee in the fight that 's sure to follow."

A prolonged wail sounded in the darkness beyond the window, and Ted turned with palm upward. "What did I tell you?" he demanded dramatically.

Rodney chuckled.

"Sit down," said Ted, "and I 'll brew some cocoa and see if I can find some crackers. We 'll have a meal with that music!"

Rodney felt more than ever drawn to Ted. They talked of this and that while they munched crackers and drank cocoa. Ted was quick with his sympathy when he learned why Rodney had come to Boston.

After a long period of silence he said, "What are you doing at school besides studying? Any dramatics, athletics?"

"No, not much of anything. I went out for basketball, but gave it up because it took so much time. I 'm interested now in joining a Scout Troop. Know anything about the Scouts?"

Ted shook his head. "That 's a thing I never went in for. Oh, it 's a good organization — no doubt about that! It 's especially good in the big cities — keeps a whole raft of fellows out of the gutters, gives them a chance to see the open country and teaches them things they 'd never learn by themselves. Sure, I 'm for the Scouts —"

"For others, but not for yourself!" added Rodney, grinning.

"That 's it exactly!" agreed Ted. He rose, adding, "More cocoa, Rod? The orchestra is still playing." He refilled Rodney's cup and sat down again.

"Here 's how I look at the thing," he went on earnestly. "A fellow with the right home influence does n't need Scout work to keep him from becoming a mucker. For a fellow like that Scouting has n't any practical value; he already knows all the important things it teaches."

"He might forget, though," suggested Rodney. "If you 're with a gang of Scouts — well, it sort of makes it easier. You just do what all the rest are doing."

"Sure," agreed Ted, "that 's what I meant when I said it 's a good thing for a whole raft of fellows — fellows who don't have the right home influence. Understand?"

Rodney laughed. "I 'm not much good at arguing. Probably you 're right, only I know the Scouts appeal to me. Besides, I 'm thinking

of the week-end trips a fellow can take with a good gang —"

"Well, anyway," said Ted, laughing, "the knot tying may come in handy when you 're in Uncle Sam's navy! Say," he added, "have you written to your congressman or senator yet about applying?"

"No, it seems pretty early in the game —"

"Yes, that 's so," agreed Ted.

It was late when Rodney returned home. He was surprised therefore to hear voices in his uncle's apartment. The door was partly open, and as he was about to enter he heard the voice of the landlady, modulated but very emphatic:

"No, I can't allow it, Mr. Eldred. Cooking appliances are not permitted. I supposed you knew that. Toast and tea — well, now, that might be overlooked; but noontimes you 've been cooking other things. I 'm sorry, but —"

"Very well, Mrs. Dort, I shall not use the burner any more." Uncle Jonathan spoke in a deferential, apologetic tone — the tone of a small boy caught in some trivial offence.

Rodney entered as the landlady was coming

out. "What 's the matter, Uncle Jonathan?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing much. Nothing very much," replied the old man in a quavering, agitated voice. "It seems Mrs. Dort objects to my little gas burner. I — well, maybe I 've been using it a bit more than usual of late. It is quite all right; I can do very well without it." He suddenly smiled and turned to his genealogical chart. "See here, Rodney, I 've been able to trace the Southworth branch back a little farther —" He continued to talk in a quick, nervous voice, explaining his difficulties and how he had surmounted them, obviously unwilling to return to the subject of the gas burner.

Rodney went to bed, again puzzled at his uncle's manner — more puzzled indeed by his manner than by the fact that he had been preparing his lunches on the gas burner. Why should Uncle Jonathan appear so perturbed about a little matter like that?

Rodney continued to apply himself to his studies, spending much of his spare time in the company of Ted Morris and in taking long

walks about the city, visiting its many places of interest. He was gradually becoming more and more accustomed to his new life; and although he was never quite free from the tragedy of his mother's death, his dark moods of utter hopelessness were less frequent. Young and vigorous and by nature cheerful, he could not help seeking the bright side of things. He told himself that he was fortunate to have so kindly and lovable an uncle with whom he could make his home, fortunate that he could continue at high school, even though he had to work hard to keep up to its standards. And then there was the Scout Troop that he planned to join.

December began with a flurry of snow that covered the ground, adding an unexpected charm to Beacon Hill. The wind blew cold from the northeast; the sky was gray, and ice began to form in the river at the foot of the street. Patches of red and green were appearing in the store windows, and the advertisements in the newspapers were adorned with sprigs of holly and evergreens and were full of "Suggestions for Christmas."

Rodney viewed the approach of the holiday season with a feeling of sadness. Christmas without a mother, his first Christmas away from home! "A Scout is cheerful," he thought; "he smiles whenever he can." Yes — whenever he can; but there are times when it costs an effort to smile. Nevertheless, he did his best to be happy, to meet the approach of Christmas with a smile of welcome.

Thus far he had written to no one in Georgeburgh. He decided now to write to Mr. Fisher and also to Frank O'Connor. It was Saturday afternoon, and Uncle Jonathan, as usual, had gone to the Historic Genealogical Society. Rodney was seated beside the window, pad and pencil in hand, when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he called, and the door opened, revealing Mrs. Dort.

"Is Mr. Eldred in?" she asked.

"No, Mrs. Dort, he has n't come in yet," replied Rodney, getting to his feet.

"Oh," said the landlady, "I thought I heard

him." She paused uncertainly, her forehead wrinkled in a frown.

"Is there anything I can do?" Rodney asked.

"Well, no," was the reply. "I guess not. I came to get the rent money. It 's — it 's two months overdue. You knew that, of course?"

"Why — n-no, I did n't!" Rodney gazed at her, wide-eyed, startled. "I thought — I supposed my uncle was —" He paused and gazed helplessly at her.

The frown deepened on Mrs. Dort's forehead. She turned abruptly toward the stairs. "You might tell him I 'll be up again after supper." And the door closed behind her.

Rodney stood rigid in the middle of the floor, his hands cold, his mouth dry. At last he walked to the window and seated himself heavily in the chair. Flakes of snow were fluttering lazily downward, drifting and eddying between the two rows of houses. He was hardly aware of them. Before his eyes rose a picture of his uncle — his uncle with a little single-jet gas burner in his hand, looking surprised and disconcerted; and he could hear his quick, nervous

voice and observe his obviously embarrassed manner, which on several occasions had so puzzled him. It did not puzzle him now. No, it was all clear now, painfully, pathetically clear. His uncle was a poor man, evidently a very poor man, unable to keep up with the rent! Other little things, seemingly unimportant at the time, returned to Rodney, full of meaning — his uncle's anxious, searching glances on the first day of their meeting, his lengthy and not very convincing explanation of his reason for changing his residence, his look of relief at hearing there was no expense attached to joining the Scout Troop. Rodney's lips quivered. His mother had been mistaken about his uncle! Dear, kind, self-sacrificing old Uncle Jonathan! In spite of his brave words and warm welcome on that rainy, misty October day, he was not able to support either himself or his nephew — no, not even with the aid of scanty noon meals cooked on a gas burner!

Rodney rose and paced slowly back and forth the length of the room. It was not of his uncle he was thinking now, but of himself. "A fool's

paradise!" he murmured bitterly. "That 's what I 've been living in!" Well, it was ended. There was only one course for him to follow — get a job, earn some money, and pay his own way in the world.

He paused abruptly, his head inclined a little on one side, his brows drawn together, his fingers lightly stroking his cheek. He could support himself perhaps, but what of his uncle who had been so kind? How was *he* to get along? He was much too old and feeble for hard work. Rodney suddenly straightened. "On my honor I will do my best to help other people at all times." There was his duty, right there in the Second Point of Honor! The path was plain before him. He must help not only himself, but also his uncle. There was no honorable way out of it!

A great lump came into his throat as he thought of high school and of the Scout Troop he had planned to join. It looked like the end of school, the end of Scouting — the end of everything!

"And our dream of Annapolis, Rodney?"

It was as if his mother's voice had asked the question there in the silent room.

Rodney walked slowly to the window. How could he go to Annapolis when he must support both himself and his uncle? He could find no answer to the question; nevertheless, with the memory of his mother fresh within him, he would not give up the thought of one day becoming a midshipman. He would try to go on somehow, doing his best, always with the goal in mind. He might fail, but at least he would try! He continued to stare out the window, his lips set, his chin lifted. The white flakes swirled and eddied — heralds of the approaching Christmas season.

CHAPTER IV

THE END OF SCHOOL

It was late in the day when Uncle Jonathan returned. The snowflakes were still swirling, and the ground was white with them. Rodney was sitting beside the window, in the semi-darkness, when his uncle entered.

"Well, well! Looks like the beginning of quite a storm! Christmas weather, Rodney, Christmas weather!" And the old man hunched his shoulders and rubbed his hands together.

"Yes, Uncle Jonathan," Rodney replied as he helped his uncle to remove his overcoat. He moistened his lips, not knowing how to voice the thoughts that were struggling for expression.

At last he said, "Mrs. Dort called for the rent this afternoon. She — she seemed worried about it. She 's coming up again this evening."

Uncle Jonathan halted abruptly midway across the room. There were a few moments of unnatural silence broken only by the tinkle of snow particles against the windowpanes. Then, "Did — did she have anything to say — anything more ?" The old man's voice was hollow, strange.

"Yes, Uncle Jonathan. She said —" Rodney gulped and then added, "She said the rent was two months overdue."

In the twilight of the room Rodney saw his uncle's hand go out and catch the edge of the table for support. "She — she told you that, did she ?" Uncle Jonathan's voice was low and lifeless. He drew a chair toward him and sat down heavily in it, his chin resting on his chest.

Rodney crossed to his side and put a hand gently on his shoulder. "Uncle Jonathan," he began, "I — I 'm afraid things are n't just the way they should be. I 'm afraid I 've been a great burden to you — a burden ever since I

came here. I did n't know. I supposed, from what my mother said, that — that you were well fixed." He paused and moistened his lips.

Uncle Jonathan just sat there with his chin against his chest.

Rodney drew up another chair and seated himself beside the table. "Won't you tell me just how things are?" he pleaded. "I want to help if I can! If there are other — other debts besides the rent, I want to help straighten them out."

The old man lifted his head slowly; tears glistened in his eyes. "You 're a good boy, Rodney, a good boy!" He put a trembling hand against his forehead, resting his elbow on the table, and there he sat, silent, motionless save for an occasional convulsive tremor of his shoulders.

Rodney waited for him to speak, moved by a surging pity.

At last Uncle Jonathan drew forth his handkerchief and blew his nose. Then with a sigh he turned pathetically toward his nephew. "I 'll have to tell you, Rodney. I did n't mean

to; I 'd hoped it would n't be necessary. But I see now it 's best you should know; I could n't have hidden it much longer. I did n't lie to you, Rodney, my boy, when I told you that first day I 'd done pretty well in business. I did do well, but a year ago last summer I lost most of what I 'd saved and put by — 'twas in bonds I 'd supposed were safe and steady. Ah, well, it 's gone and there 's an end of it. Of course your mother knew naught of that, Rodney."

He drew his hands together and tapped his fingertips meditatively; then he went on in a brighter, more natural voice: "It might be worse for me, Rodney. Up to now I 'd succeeded in living on my little income. Except that back rent, I don't owe much to speak of —"

"You got along all right till I came!" Rodney spoke with bitter self-accusation.

"There, now," said his uncle, "I just bought a little extra furniture we needed. That 's why the rent got behind —"

"Furniture for me!" Rodney interrupted him. "That bed in my room, maybe that bureau and the rug —"

"There, now," repeated the old man, "I got the bureau secondhand! It did n't cost me much." He continued with an air of triumph, "Come the first of the year, I 'll have a little more than at present. 'Twill pay the rent, and then we can go right along just as we 've been doing! I hope to find some light work to do —"

But Rodney shook his head. "No, Uncle Jonathan, we can't go on in the same way. At least I can't —"

"But your mother, my boy, and her plans for you —"

"I 've thought it out pretty carefully," Rodney replied, "and I can't let you continue to make sacrifices for me. My mother would be the last person in the world to want me to do it! As for Annapolis, that 's pretty far off. I — I think I can arrive there — somehow."

Uncle Jonathan regarded his nephew tragically. "What — what do you plan to do, Rodney?"

"I 'm going to get a job."

"You 'd give up high school?"

"Yes," was the reply. "What little I might

earn after school hours would n't help at all. I 've thought it out pretty carefully," he repeated. "I 'll get a job somewhere and go to night school. Lots of fellows do it — work in the day and study at night." Then observing his uncle's dejected attitude, he continued earnestly, "It will pan out finely, Uncle Jonathan! I 'll continue to live here, if you want me, and I 'll pay my share of the expenses. Please don't feel badly about it. Come, now, it 's all settled! Had n't we better go and have supper?"

Rodney had succeeded in putting on a brave appearance before his uncle; but that evening, after Mrs. Dort had called again and he lay awake in bed, listening to the wind-driven snow against the glass, his heart was heavy. The blow had come just when life was beginning to hold forth fresh attractions for him. Now he must give up high school, give up Scout interests, and earn his own living. He remembered his words to Mr. Fisher back in Georgeburgh: "I 'm not equipped to make my own way in the world!" And what was it the Scoutmaster had replied? "You have your Scout training, Rod-

ney. It will help you, I 'm sure, in solving the many new problems that will confront you." The words had not convinced him then; they did not convince him now. Nevertheless, his thoughts dwelt on the Scouts, on the Troop that he had planned to join. He wondered if it would n't be possible to join after all, perhaps when he had a job and things were a little more settled. A fellow certainly needed something besides just work and study! He determined to make the effort.

The following morning, Sunday, he went to church with his uncle. The day was brisk and clear after the storm, and the houses on the hill were dusted white. Snow clung to the crevices between the bricks, to the twisting stems of the old wisteria vines that wound upward against some of the walls, and to the window ledges and fire escapes. It was a pleasant picture — even the sad ailanthus trees looked a little less sad, encrusted with fresh-fallen snow. On such a morning it seemed to Rodney impossible to be downhearted; and later, in the little church, he found inspiration in the text of the sermon:

"They helped every one his neighbor ; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage."

Rodney reflected on the advice, and it occurred to him that it covered two points in the Scout Law. "A Scout is helpful." "A Scout is brave." Courage! What an important word it was! If a fellow could only keep his courage up, he could get along somehow. But it required a tremendous amount of will to do it sometimes. And then it occurred to him that will and courage, moral courage, were often pretty much the same thing. He remembered the championship basketball game back at Middleton. He remembered the formula of General Foch: "Victory equals will." It was true! Georgeburgh had won the championship on the strength of that phrase. Why could n't a fellow go through life with it as a sort of motto? It seemed to him very clear, very sensible, as he sat there in the mellow light of the church.

That afternoon Rodney went to the room of Ted Morris. He found him sprawled on the window seat, with the Sunday *Globe* in his lap

and Saturday's *Transcript* strewn about on the floor.

"Greetings, Rod, old man!" Ted exclaimed.

"Busy?" inquired Rodney.

"No, just watching the cats." Ted grinned and nodded toward the back yards. "See them out there? A black one, a white one, and a gray one — funny how I always happen to see them in threes! Three's a crowd, and that means a fight. Yep, there they go! Whish! Oh, boy, did you see that?"

Rodney reached the window just in time to catch sight of the white cat going over a fence, pursued by the two others.

"They'll never catch Whitey, not in this snow!" said Ted, laughing. "Protective coloration! He can pose as a snowdrift or a snowball or something. What's new?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, nothing much, I guess. I'm looking for a job now, that's all."

"A job? What do you mean, Rod?"

After a few moments of hesitation Rodney

told him of the reason for the change that he had to make in his plans.

"Oh, say, I 'm awfully sorry to hear that!" said Ted. "I certainly am! But, gosh, I do admire your uncle — trying to go on the way you said, just hoping he could manage somehow! You did the right thing, Rod. It 's tough on you, no doubt about it, but you did the right thing!"

"Anybody else would have done the same," replied Rodney.

But Ted shook his head. "I know some who would n't — at least they 'd croak and bellyache about it."

Rodney shrugged his shoulders. After a pause he said, "I had an idea you might have gone home over the week-end —"

"I had that idea, too," said Ted, laughing. "Instead I decided to stay and do a bit of studying — but I have n't done it," he added with another laugh. "Read the papers all morning, wrote a few letters after lunch, and then watched the cats. I 'm mighty glad you came in — no mood for study! What sort of work are you going to find?"

"I don't know, Ted. I don't seem to be fitted for anything in particular. I 'd like a job with —"

"With short hours and long pay!" added Ted, grinning.

Rodney smiled. "I suppose I 'll find some sort of clerical job."

"Gosh, it 's tough you have to do it! But you 've got great spirit, Rod, not to get all down in the mouth and chuck Annapolis and everything. Look," he added, "maybe we can study together sometimes — I mean in your spare hours. If I can be of any help, you bet I 'll be glad to give it! Remember that, won't you?"

"I certainly will. It helps just to have you feel that way."

They continued to talk until late in the afternoon, and then Rodney took his leave, feeling somehow that after all there were worse things than having to give up school and go to work.

The next morning he made known his decision at the high school. He had a conference with his teacher and also with the assistant principal, Dr. Grant. They were both sorry to have him

go, but they were frank in saying they saw no alternative. "It may be, however," observed Dr. Grant, "that the economic situation at home will improve. If it does, I hope you will come back. For I feel it my duty to point out to you that your present plan is apt to be fraught with difficulties. For example, you will have to do most of your studying at night when you will be tired after a day's work. My advice to you is to try and find some kind of work that will be interesting and not too exhausting. That appears to me even more important than earning high wages. And if you should need a recommendation, don't hesitate to call on me."

Rodney returned home with a sense of loneliness. High school was behind him now, out of his life. He had said good-by to his more intimate classmates, knowing that most of them he should never see again. It seemed to him that in the past few months he had been saying good-by to things one after another — things that were dear to him.

In the letter box on Pinckney Street he found a protruding white envelope addressed to him.

It was unstamped, unsealed. He drew forth a sheet of paper with a small newspaper clipping pasted in the middle; at the side was a note in pencil: "Rod: I spied this ad in the *Transcript*. Looked as if it might be good. Thought of you right off. Ted."

Rodney read the clipping: "Young man wanted; pleasing personality, easy hours, good pay. Phone Back Bay 9375."

"Good old Ted!" he said to himself.

He called the number that afternoon. A man's voice, a voice with a foreign accent, replied to his inquiry about the nature of the work. He said he was planning to start a small magazine for readers who were interested in music. He needed an assistant, some one who would help with the work at the start and who might eventually take over the full duties of editor. He said the pay at first would be fifteen dollars a week, and that, when the magazine was prospering, it would increase. Rodney made an appointment with him for the following morning.

After supper, when he had spoken to his uncle about his prospect, he hurried out to find Ted.

"So that 's what it is?" observed Ted, when Rodney had given an account of his conversation over the telephone. "You never can tell what 's behind an ad. 'Easy hours, good pay.' Well, maybe the hours are good even if the pay is n't. You 're going to see the fellow?"

"Yes, to-morrow. I 'm a little scared, though!"

"Foolish kid!" exclaimed Ted. "No need to be scared. You 're not scared about the work, are you? That ought to be easy. Did n't you tell me you helped on your freshman class book out in Ohio?"

"Yeh, helped solicit ads!"

"Well, there you are," remarked Ted. "That 's probably what you 'll have to do here — that is, if you care to take the job."

"I think I do," Rodney said earnestly. "And if it works out, I 'll owe you a debt of gratitude."

"Huh," said Ted, "I guess not!"

At half past ten the following morning Rodney set off to keep his appointment. The address the man had given him was on Huntington Avenue, in the lower end of the city, and he had

been told to ask for Mr. Gustav Veresko. He found the place without any trouble; it was a dark, old-style building with stores on the first floor and offices above. Veresko had a small office on the second floor.

Rodney, entering, saw a man seated, bent over a golden-oak rolltop desk; he was perhaps forty years old, short, heavy-shouldered, and had a thick mass of curly reddish hair that looked as if it had never known comb or brush. At sight of his visitor he got impulsively to his feet.

"Mr. Veresko?" said Rodney inquiringly.

"Yes, yes, I am Mr. Veresko. You — ah, you are Mr. Owen — so? Good! I am glad you came! You will sit down, and I will tell you about what I am doing." With a quick movement he drew a chair beside the desk, then fished a cigarette from a package in one of the cubby holes and lit it.

During the process Rodney had a chance to observe the man's face. The forehead was high and broad; the eyes, pale blue with a kind of burning intensity about them, the nose, large and aquiline; the mouth, sensitive.

"I am making plans to start a magazine," Veresko began in quick, nervous tones. "It will be called the *Little Music Master*. It will be small — so." And he made two rapid gestures with his hands — slender hands with long, tapering fingers. "Once a week it will come out, and in it I will print what people, artists like myself for instance, will like to read — reviews, critiques of concerts, the opera — everything! You understand? Little notes about artists who perform. That is very interesting."

He took three or four rapid puffs at his cigarette and then continued: "I am a very busy man. You have heard of the American Players? That is my orchestra; I am the leader of it. I am very busy. I am not able to do the work of this magazine alone by myself. I want somebody who will take it off my hands — somebody who is intelligent. You understand? Ah, yes, and we must have advertisements to make it pay! I want somebody who can get people to advertise in my magazine. You could do all that?"

"I 'm sure I could learn," replied Rodney.

"But," he added, "I don't know much of anything about music —"

"No matter!" the other interrupted him. "I myself will write the critiques. I have friends who will also write. You are interested, eh? You would wish to start work?"

"Yes," said Rodney.

Veresko tossed his cigarette on the floor. "You will let me have your address," he said, reaching for a pencil. "You will hear from me maybe." A few moments later he rose and strode to the door. "Good-by," he added with a quick bow. "I will let you know."

A week passed, and Rodney received no word from Gustav Veresko. Still he did not give up hope. Veresko was a busy man; his orchestra duties had kept him from writing, no doubt. The more Rodney thought about the job the more he liked it. Fifteen dollars a week was not bad; it would pay his way and perhaps leave a little to spare. And the work would be pleasant and certainly not too arduous.

Two days before Christmas more snow began to fall. It continued all night and until noon

the next day. That evening, Christmas eve, Rodney and his uncle went out together to see the candles in the windows and hear the carol singers. The wind was cold and sharp, and a full moon rolling about among scattered clouds poured its silver down upon the housetops and marked the snow-covered streets with clear-cut patterns of black and white.

Beacon Hill that evening was like nothing that Rodney had ever seen or imagined. Rows of candles gleamed at nearly every window, casting forth a soft, mellow light, giving to the narrow streets an air of dignified gayety. The great dome of the State House seemed aglow with pale fire, and hundreds of candles were burning in its many windows. Snow and moonlight and candle flames, clusters of red and green and orange electric bulbs at picturesque doorways, illuminated plaques at windows, and crowds of people, laughing, joyous with the holiday spirit — such was Rodney's first impression of Beacon Hill on a Christmas eve.

He and his uncle mingled with the crowds, moving along one street and turning into

another. Many of the residents of the hill were holding open house, and Rodney had glimpses of brightly lighted drawing-rooms, of resplendent Christmas trees and laughing guests gathered under sparkling old-fashioned chandeliers glistening like clusters of ice particles.

Male voices rose on the crisp air as he and his uncle were turning into Mount Vernon Street. "It 's the carolers," said Uncle Jonathan, and they quickened their steps toward Louisburg Square, where many people had gathered.

A group of men and boys were standing in the snow, singing "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen" — dark shapes in the moonlight. Rodney listened with a lump in his throat. His thoughts were on his mother. She, too, perhaps had heard the carols on Beacon Hill when she was a little girl. Somehow he felt that she was very near to him that night.

And the feeling persisted long after he was home and the candles were out and the voices silent. Lying with his head buried in the pillow, tears filled his eyes, and he murmured, "O God, please help me to — to go on!"

CHAPTER V

CORPUSCLES

Shortly after Christmas, just when Rodney had almost given up hope of ever hearing from Gustav Veresko, a letter came from the man — a brief half-dozen lines scrawled on the back of a music program, saying he wanted Rodney to begin work at once. With an exclamation of triumph, Rodney got into his overcoat, and a few minutes later he was on his way toward Huntington Avenue, buoyed up by the thought that now he had a job — a good job full of promise.

Gustav Veresko sprang to his feet as Rodney entered the office. "Ah, good morning!" he

exclaimed. "You are pleased, eh? That is good! You are bright; you have education. That is why I give you the job. I expect much from you. We can start in now — at once! In a half-hour I must keep an appointment — but first I can show you what you must know."

Rodney sat down beside the desk, which was littered with papers. Veresko began to fumble among them. Finally he succeeded in finding the one he wanted.

"This is the dummy for the first number," he said. "You see, I have done most of the work. You will read it to be sure it has no mistakes. There and there," he added, pointing to a couple of blank spaces, "you must put something in that will fit. You will find material in the drawer. You are intelligent. You will not have trouble. It must go at four o'clock to the printer. You understand?"

The telephone on the desk rang at that moment, and Veresko answered it. Then he rose. "I must leave the office. I cannot wait. You will make yourself fámiliar with your work.

It is your desk," he added. "You will use it more than I will."

After he had gone, Rodney sat down at the desk with a feeling of bewilderment. He had never before seen so chaotic a desk! The blotter was covered with sheets of note paper, galley proofs, programs, booklets, newspaper clippings, and a generous sprinkling of cigarette ashes. The pigeon holes were choked with odds and ends — old letters, violin strings, additional clippings, picture postcards, music scores, a thumb-worn pocket dictionary, a pair of old suède gloves and a multitude of pencil stubs.

He picked up the dummy of the *Little Music Master*. The magazine was six inches by eight and had four pages. The paper was rough newsprint, the ink very black and smudgy. The front page was devoted to the account of a recent concert given by the American Players — a very laudatory account signed by Gustav Veresko. Rodney read it through twice, correcting a misspelled word here and there and smiling, in spite of himself, at the blunt words of praise for the concert. It was evident that

Veresko had a very good opinion of his orchestra. On the two inner pages there were news notes pertaining to singers and musicians whom Rodney knew nothing about, a list of concerts that were to be held at Jordan Hall, Symphony Hall and other halls, and a few advertisements of places and people in the vicinity — a lunchroom, a dance hall, a school of music, a singing teacher, a violin instructor. The back page was covered by an advertisement of the American Players.

Rodney pulled out the drawer that held the additional galleys. He read them through and, after considerable choosing, found two news notes that fitted the blank spaces in the dummy. Having done that, he set to work straightening up the desk. It was one o'clock before he finished. Then he went out to lunch.

Towards the middle of the afternoon Veresko returned, glanced at the dummy and told Rodney to take it to the printer's, on Columbus Avenue.

"Now," he said when Rodney had returned, "we must prepare our second number. You see how it is done. If you need to know anything,

ask me. Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, suddenly fishing in his pocket. "You must, in your spare time, talk to people who would advertise in our magazine." He drew forth a typewritten sheet and passed it to Rodney, saying, "This tells our rates — everything you will need to know."

Soon after that he went out again, and Rodney did not see him until the following afternoon, when he entered in company with two foreign-looking men, both evidently musicians like himself. He answered the questions that Rodney had ready for him, talked with several persons over the telephone, conversed for half an hour in a foreign tongue with his two companions; and then all three left the office.

It took Rodney a week to become well acquainted with his work. At the end of that time he began to feel at his ease. He solicited advertisements with more success than he had expected, calling upon persons, professional and otherwise, who were established in the vicinity. When the second number of the *Little Music Master* appeared, he could not repress a feeling of pleasure; for he had put the number together

almost alone. There it was — something that he had created, something that other people would read and comment upon!

The magazine was supposed to sell at ten cents a copy; as a matter of fact, very few copies were sold at all. Veresko had arranged with two or three boys to have the magazine distributed free of charge wherever the music-loving public gathered — in the various music halls and even on the busy street corners. It became clear to Rodney, as he gained a more thorough knowledge of his work, that the *Little Music Master* brought no direct profit to its owner; on an average the advertisements just about paid the cost of printing, with a little over. Figuring his own weekly pay of fifteen dollars and the pay to the boys who distributed the paper, he concluded that the enterprise was really losing money.

He spoke to Veresko about it one afternoon; but the man only shrugged one shoulder and smiled.

"You are very simple," he observed. "I do not complain about taking a few dollars from my pocket each week when it pays for letting

people know about my orchestra. I am becoming better known. I am in demand, as one says. The magazine is very helpful to me. You understand?"

Rodney did understand. The *Little Music Master* was merely a medium of propaganda — legitimate enough no doubt, but with no higher purpose whatsoever. Nor was there the future in it that Veresko had so suavely talked about at first. Nevertheless Rodney found the work to his liking and was able to continue his studies. He entered night school, and when he became adjusted to work and study, he began to think again of joining the Scout Troop.

Toward the end of January he did join. The Troop met regularly every Friday evening at the home of Mr. James Holman, the Scoutmaster. He owned a small barn, which he used as a garage; but the upper floor was empty and, with a stove installed, made excellent Headquarters. Rodney was the only member who worked; the rest of the boys were either at high school or grammar school. Some of them reminded him of his brother Scouts out in Ohio.

Ken Cauffman, for example, was tall and dark like Paul Stearns, and Henry Basset had a way of smiling that made him think of Frank O'Connor. Good fellows he found them without exception, friendly and full of fun, and Friday evening soon became his bright spot in the week. Often when he was at work he would look forward to it — to the games to be played in the old barn, to the story telling and readings that Mr. Holman gave, and to the hikes and trips to be planned. In a number of cases his hours on the *Little Music Master* prevented him from taking part in some of the activities; but before the end of the winter he was able to make several overnight camping trips with the Troop — one to an abandoned cabin not far from Lexington, another to a winter camp owned by a brother-in-law of Mr. Holman.

Life again seemed to have lost many of its troubles. Rodney was a Scout among congenial companions; he and his uncle were meeting expenses and saving a little each week; he was able to study with profit; and he had the best kind of friend in Ted Morris.

Meanwhile he had learned other things about Gustav Veresko and his orchestra. Veresko, he found, was an Austrian and an excellent violinist. The American Players, under his leadership, was made up of another Austrian, a Pole, a Russian, and a Lithuanian — hardly American, hardly a full orchestra worthy of the grandiloquent praise voiced on the last page of the *Little Music Master* each week or of the leading articles written by Veresko himself. Still Rodney found no cause for complaint. Things were not always as advertised; it would be the same perhaps, in a lesser degree, if he were working for some one else.

But in the spring he began to notice a change in the *Little Music Master* — a change that puzzled him and set him to thinking. Thus far all of the material that had gone into the magazine pertained to music, propaganda very largely for the American Players. Now he observed that some of the copy written by Veresko and his friends dealt with political and economic questions — disgruntled paragraphs on the American "capitalist press", editorial articles on the "unfair distribution of wealth",

pointed remarks on "religion that makes slaves of the workers", tersely-expressed views on the "improved conditions" in Russia following the revolution, and hints at the proper remedy for all troubles in America. Before very long it was clear that the magazine had a double motive: that of advertising Veresko's orchestra and that of disseminating revolutionary propaganda.

For some time Rodney hesitated, and all the while the conviction grew upon him that, no matter how he looked at it, he could no longer continue in his present position. "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country —" it was plain enough right there in the first point of the Scout Oath, the First Point of Honor. He was not doing his duty either to God or to his country by assisting in the work of spreading such revolutionary doctrines. To remain in his present position would be an act of hypocrisy.

He made his decision one Saturday morning. It was not easy. It meant the loss of a job that in every way save one was very much to his taste. It meant a fresh upset in his life, fresh

worry, fresh groping to find himself again. But he made it with a feeling of relief and of duty well done.

Gustav Veresko came into the office and tossed a sheet of paper on the desk, observing, "We must have the printer set that in type to-day."

Rodney glanced at the article; it was headed, "The Man in the White House." He scanned the first paragraphs and found in them a thinly veiled and ridiculously unfair attack on the President — his morals, his mentality, his tyrannical power. Moved by an unreasoning impulse, he banged the paper down upon the desk blotter and sprang to his feet with such force that he overturned the chair. Then, whirling, he faced his employer.

Veresko was speechless, his face white, his lips quivering.

"Eh?" he finally gasped. "What do you do? What — what —" He seemed to choke on the words. With hands clenched against his chest, he advanced toward Rodney, his eyes like baleful points of fire.

Rodney was suddenly afraid of him — afraid

of the light in his eyes. "I 'm through!" he said. "I was going to tell you anyway — and then you handed me that paper." All the while he kept his gaze fixed on Veresko's eyes, ready with his fists in case the man should yield to his passion.

For perhaps half a minute the two faced each other thus. Then Veresko's lips curled in a sneer, and his body relaxed. He walked to the desk and, picking up the piece of paper, thrust it into his pocket.

"Get out!" he said, motioning savagely toward the door. "You are a fool! An idiot! Go!"

Rodney gathered up his belongings from the desk and put on his coat and hat. "I have a week's pay coming to me," he said.

"You will not get it! Fool! Idiot!" Veresko spat upon the floor. "Get out!"

The color mounted to Rodney's face; his eyes flashed vivid blue, and he felt a sudden wild desire to pound the man with his fists. He was not afraid of him now. In his anger he felt equal to beating that red head into a jelly — not for

money, not for fifteen well-earned dollars, but merely for the principle of the thing! With a quick movement he whipped off his coat again and tossed it on the floor.

"I 'm going to get that pay!" he cried, advancing upon the man.

Veresko backed away from him. He was heavier than Rodney, but less well trained — and now it was Rodney who was angry, carried away by a sense of injustice, determined to work his will on the man who had sought to browbeat him. Veresko hesitated, sneered, then with a contemptuous laugh reached into his pocket. He counted out three five-dollar bills and threw them on the desk. Rodney picked them up and, without a word, strode toward his overcoat. He tossed it across his arm, turned and glared at Veresko, then left the office, slamming the door heavily behind him.

He was out of a job, but the memory of those last few seconds more than made up for the loss! He was aware of a newly awakened confidence in himself, of a feeling of latent strength that was very pleasant to contemplate. Without

knowing it, Rodney had passed a crisis. It had exacted a sacrifice, but it had left him the stronger for it.

Ted Morris was indignant when he heard of Rodney's encounter with Veresko. His dark eyes flashed, and he clenched his fist. "The mutt!" he exclaimed. "Trying to get away with that kind of stuff! Why does n't he go to Russia if he thinks it 's so much better there? But, oh, no! He 's like the rest of these wild-eyed reformers — stay in America and make money! Make more here than they could anywhere else in the world! And all the while they 're making it, they 're trying to stab Uncle Sam in the back! Gee!" he added with a grin. "I 'd liked to have seen you when you started after him like that!"

"I was mad," said Rodney. "It was n't the money, Ted, honest it was n't! Maybe you won't believe it, but after I was in the street I was tempted to throw those bills into the gutter — just to prove that I did n't care!"

"I understand," replied Ted. "It was the principle of the thing. Only — gosh! — I just

can't imagine you getting mad enough to beat somebody up! You're so easy-going all the time. Well, now you'll begin to hunt for another job, I suppose. Anything in mind?"

"Not a thing," said Rodney.

"Why don't you go to that Scoutmaster of yours? He might know of something."

"Oh, I hate to bother him."

"Don't be foolish!" said Ted. "I'll bet he'd be tickled to have you come to him."

"Well, maybe I will."

Before Rodney left his companion he inquired about his school and studies.

Ted made a wry face. "Oh, I'm all right that way, I guess, only I do have a dickens of a time studying. So many other things I'm interested in, and I've got the sort of mind that likes to wander off and think about unimportant matters —"

"Such as cats," added Rodney, grinning.

"Yes, such as cats," Ted repeated solemnly. "I counted six of them while I was dressing this morning — two pairs of threes, you know."

"But you stand all right in class, don't you?" Rodney inquired.

"About average. You know, Rod," Ted went on earnestly, "I could lead the class easily if I wanted to put in the time studying. I don't mean to brag; you know that. But it's a fact!"

"Why don't you?" asked Rodney.

Ted shrugged his shoulders without replying.

"I know the trouble with you," said Rodney. "You're not really interested in any one thing — I mean you're not head-over-heels interested. If —"

Ted suddenly came out of his solemn mood. He sprang to his feet and, laughing, rumpled his companion's hair. "I can read what's behind that noble brow of thine!" he exclaimed, still laughing. "You'd like me to go into the Scout business! Honest, now, wouldn't you? It would cure me, make a man of me, and at two o'clock next week — behold! Ted Morris at the top of his class!"

"I think it might help some," Rodney insisted.

"No," said Ted, shaking his head in a tragi-comic manner, "I 'm too old. You 're a mere child, compared with me. The time for all that, if you have such inclinations, is when you 're in your early teens. I 'm too old a dog, Rod, too old a dog!"

Rodney laughed and made no attempt to press the matter.

Over the week-end he read the newspaper advertisements, and on Monday he answered two or three of them. But the jobs were either already filled or were not the kind of work for which he was fitted. Throughout the rest of the week he continued his search, at the same time attending his night-school classes. Finally he called Mr. Holman on the telephone, and the Scoutmaster suggested that he come and see him Sunday evening.

Rodney reached Mr. Holman's house about eight o'clock. The Scoutmaster was a lean, dark-complexioned man of thirty-five or so. He had served as a captain of infantry in France, and there was still the look of the army man about him — a crisp, authoritative manner of

speaking at times, an alert, disciplined way of standing or sitting.

"Well, Rodney," he said when he had lit his pipe, "I 'm glad you had the good sense to come to me. I 'm not sure I can do much for you, but I 'm certainly interested, and I 'll make an effort. What about the old job? Why did you give it up?"

Rodney replied in a few sentences.

"Hm," said Mr. Holman, "of course you could n't stick on in a case like that."

"At first I felt badly about losing the job," continued Rodney. "I don't now, though. You know what bothers me, Mr. Holman? It 's the thought of Veresko, printing that kind of stuff week after week. Seems to me it 's bound to do harm!"

"I would n't worry too much about Veresko," observed the Scoutmaster. "Corpuscles of that kind are really in a small minority in America."

"Corpuscles?" repeated Rodney wonderingly.

Mr. Holman smiled and reached for a book on the table beside him. He thumbed the pages

in silence for a few moments; then with a glance at his visitor he began to read:

"'The welfare of our bodies depends upon the circulation and health of our blood. There are in the blood minute little organisms, like very small animals, upon which the health of the blood depends. If the blood contains the right proportion of a certain kind of corpuscles, as these little organisms are called, it will be healthy and make the whole man strong; but if the corpuscles are not in their right proportions, the blood will be wrong, the circulation will be poor, and the power of resisting physical disease will be weak.'"

The Scoutmaster paused and said, "Here 's the point, Rodney," and he continued to read:

"'It is just so with the life of the nation as a whole. It depends ultimately upon the strength of every individual citizen and, even more than that, upon the strength of every man, woman and child and of every inhabitant within its borders. It is the duty of every single individual in these United States to be as strong as he possibly can be in his body, his mind, and his

character; and, by so doing, he will be serving his country in the very best way possible. This is the most important way of doing our duty to our country, and corresponds exactly with our duty to God; if we begin by serving our country in this way, we shall find out many other special ways of being useful to it.'"

He closed the book, adding with a smile, "So you see, Rodney, we are all of us corpuscles. Veresko is the wrong kind; you and I and most of us are the right kind. We are in a very large majority, and while we remain so, the harm the other kind can do will be small. Of course we must watch ourselves and be alert, as you were."

"Who wrote that, Mr. Holman?" Rodney asked.

"A man named Arthur Carey. The book is called 'The Scout Law in Practice' and is based on talks to Sea Scouts during the cruises of the Boy Scout ship, *Pioneer*. It is the most reasonable and enlightening thing of its kind I 've ever seen. Take it along if you 're interested. It 's full of meat." And he passed the book to his visitor.

Rodney was deeply impressed by the paragraphs that Mr. Holman had read. He had of course often thought of patriotism, but he had always associated it with war or public service, something dramatic, spectacular. The idea of serving one's country in the "very best way possible" by merely living in accordance with what was right was a revelation to him; and the idea seemed to him doubly significant, coming to him as it did from a man like Mr. Holman, who had served his country in time of war.

They continued to talk on that and kindred matters for some time; and all the while the Scoutmaster, without Rodney's being aware of it, was estimating him, forming a more rounded opinion of him. It occurred to Rodney as rather strange that Mr. Holman should be so much interested in his life. He did not realize that men of the right sort the world over are bound to be drawn to a boy who is ambitious, respectful, and eager to learn.

At the end of almost an hour and a half the Scoutmaster wrote a note at his desk and, placing it in an envelope, which he addressed, handed

it to Rodney. "Take this to Mr. Holbrook Devereux, on Milk Street," he said. "I am not at all sure that anything will come of it; he may have nothing to offer, but it will do no harm to see him. Let me know what happens. Good luck to you!"

Reaching the street, Rodney set off toward home, walking at a brisk pace. Of late walking had become his chief form of exercise, of keeping fit. Now as he made his way homeward, his thoughts returned to his interview with the Scoutmaster, particularly to the little treatise on patriotism to which he had listened. It was so clear, so clean-cut, so convincing — and yet you never heard people discuss that kind of patriotism. You never read about it in the newspapers. Always in the newspapers, it seemed, the patriot was the man who died for his country or did something big and conspicuous — something that every one talked about. The idea set him to thinking. He wondered if there were not a great many other matters of a similar nature.

On Monday morning Rodney reported at the office of Mr. Holbrook Devereux. Mr. Dever-

eux was the president of a nationally known business that had more than tripled in volume since the close of the war. He was a small, unprepossessing man with shrewd gray eyes and a florid complexion.

"So you 're one of Mr. Holman's boys, eh?" he said after he had read the letter of introduction. "Fine fellow, Holman. Thinks quite a lot of you, does n't he?"

"I — I really don't know, sir," replied Rodney, rather confused by the question.

"Well, tell me about yourself," Mr. Devereux went on crisply, "age, schooling — anything you think might be interesting." And he leaned back in his chair, gazing out the window.

Rodney observed a great mass of papers on Mr. Devereux's desk — letters, telegrams, legal-looking documents. They said to him plainly that the president had much work before him. Rodney decided to be as brief as possible; and with that thought in mind he began his account.

Mr. Devereux continued to gaze out the window as he listened. When the account was finished, he swung forward in his chair again,

stroked his chin thoughtfully and then rose. "Put all that in a letter," he said, "and anything else you think might interest me." He held out his hand. "Good day to you."

Rodney wrote the letter that afternoon and mailed it. Then he sought out Ted Morris.

Ted's eyes widened when Rodney told him about his interview with Mr. Devereux. "Say, old man!" he exclaimed. "If a young fellow lands a job with those people, he's got something! My father has talked a lot about Devereux. He's quite a wizard! That's a real company, that is! They don't start a man on much less than thirty dollars a week, and if he's the right kind, he's fixed!"

"But I don't want to go into business permanently. You know that, Ted. All I want —"

"Oh, sure, I know that," Ted interrupted him, "But s'pose you could see a ten-thousand dollar job ahead of you? And beyond that a still bigger job? Would you want to go to Annapolis?"

Rodney regarded him in surprise. "Why — why, yes. Would n't you?"

"I 'd hate to have to decide!" Ted replied, laughing. "I 'm strong for the Navy, Rod. I feel it 's my calling, but, gosh, if anybody offered me a job with a big future — well, I 'm terribly afraid I 'd grab it! Money is such a doggone important thing in this world! Why, if I had enough of it, I could start a navy of my own! A steam yacht, a sailing yacht, a couple of fast motor boats —"

"Ted, old man, you 're talking through your hat!" said Rodney, poking him in the ribs.

More than a week passed before Rodney heard from Mr. Devereux. During that time he studied, read books and magazines and the newspapers, took walks about the town and even interested himself in genealogy, greatly to the delight of his uncle.

And then one day he had a brief note from Mr. Devereux, making an appointment for the following afternoon. That evening Rodney lay awake for a long time, thinking about his meeting on the morrow. Supposing Mr. Devereux should offer him a job in the office — say, a job at thirty dollars a week, as Ted had suggested.

But, no, he could n't expect so much as that. Say, twenty-five a week. That seemed more likely. Rodney continued to meditate. Ted was right; money was a pretty important thing in this world! He thought of his clothes, which were beginning to grow shabby. He really needed a new suit — yes, and new shoes and a new supply of socks and shirts. And there was his uncle; he always managed to look neat, but how pleasant it would be to present him with a new overcoat and a new hat!

The following afternoon when Rodney entered Mr. Devereux's office he thought the president appeared more friendly than on the first occasion. He smiled as he shook Rodney's hand; then when both were seated, he said abruptly: "Your letter interested me very much. So you think you'd like to enter the Navy some day?"

"Yes, sir, I 'm working for it."

"Well, if your mind is made up on that score, I 'm afraid there 's nothing here I can offer you."

Rodney's heart sank.

"We are looking for a few young men right now," Mr. Devereux continued, "young men

who would begin at the very bottom and learn the business, working up in time to positions of responsibility and promise. Naturally we could n't take on a young man who would leave us just when he was in a fair way to be useful to us. You understand that of course."

Rodney swallowed hard. "Yes, I understand, Mr. Devereux. But when I came to you, it was with the thought that there might be some sort of a clerical job I could fill —"

Mr. Devereux nodded and then was silent for some time. At last he said, "I had lunch with Mr. Holman last week. He told me a number of things about you. I also got in touch with Dr. Grant and a Mr. Fisher, out in Ohio. As a result of my inquiries I feel that I know you rather well."

He paused again, and Rodney waited, puzzled, not quite comprehending the purport of the man's words.

"If you should care to go into business, putting Annapolis one side," Mr. Devereux said abruptly, "I am willing to give you a chance here with us. You are rather young, it 's true,

but you appear older than you really are — and your youth," he added with a smile, "is a disadvantage you will outgrow. As you may possibly know, we start all our young men at a salary of fifteen hundred a year. For the first few years that is a losing proposition for us, but in the long run it more than pays. Those young men, if they are the right sort, move steadily upward in the business, becoming increasingly useful to us and earning increasingly large salaries. I don't ask you to decide this minute. I offer no arguments against a naval career; there is a future in the Navy, although not so big a future, measured in dollars and cents, as in some other callings. I suggest that you think it over for a few days and then let me know."

He rose, adding, "Let me hear from you as soon as you 've decided, won't you?"

Rodney returned to Pinckney Street, feeling quite incapable of calm, sober thought. Uncle Jonathan, as usual, was at his favorite haunt — a fact for which Rodney was thankful. He wanted to be alone, to think things out in his

own way. He sat down in the chair beside the window and propped his feet against the table.

For a long time he sat there motionless, his gaze fixed on a slow-moving mass of clouds above the housetops. He recalled the words of Ted Morris: "If a young fellow lands a job with those people, he 's got something! . . . If he 's the right kind, he 's fixed!" Rodney moistened his lips. A definite offer — that was what they had made him. And why? Well, probably because Mr. Holman had said some nice things about him — and also Dr. Grant and Mr. Fisher. The thought made him realize, as he had never realized before, that everything a fellow does is apt to be important, apt to have some bearing on his later life. He had always played fair with Mr. Fisher, and now, because Mr. Fisher and a few others had spoken a good word for him, he had the offer of a fine job.

What should he do? Should he give up his chance of entering Annapolis? After all, it was only a chance. He might fail to get the appointment. And even if he got it, he might not pass the examinations. Rodney moved uneasily in

the chair. He knew what Ted would do in such a case. Ted had told him in so many words: "If anybody offered me a job with a big future — well, I 'm terribly afraid I 'd grab it! Money is such a doggone important thing in this word!"

Yes, money was an important thing! Rodney noted the threadbare sleeves of his blue coat, his scuffed shoes, his old felt hat lying on the table. He gazed about the room at the cheap furniture. He thought of the new overcoat and the new hat he would like to give his uncle. And then he thought of the pleasures he had denied himself ever since he came to Boston. "A Scout is thrifty." The phrase popped into his mind, and he smiled over it rather grimly. He certainly had been thrifty! He had been more than thrifty! Did n't he really owe it to himself to earn a great deal of money, so long as he could earn it honestly?

All that was true. The real question was: should he give up his chance of going to Annapolis, of entering upon a career that he felt to be his calling? Or should he continue to strive

and stint himself for two more years, perhaps longer than that, with the possibility of failure at the end? When he thought of the studying, the grind, the uncertainty, that lay ahead of him, his courage seemed to ebb away. Night school three evenings a week, a job of some kind during the day, long hours, little time for pleasure, two or three more years of watching the pennies, of wearing clothes that were old and shabby — it was more than he could bear.

In a choking voice he murmured, "I can't do it! It's not worth it! I'd be a fool — a fool —"

The room suddenly felt stifling. He rose and, seizing his hat, hurried into the hallway and down the stairs, not knowing where he was going, aware only that he must get out into the open air.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW JOB

Rodney walked down Pinckney Street to the esplanade along the river. The air was mild, the water blue and smiling under the late-afternoon sun. With head thrown back and arms rhythmically swinging, he set off along the embankment, feeling a kind of delirious elation in the effort of rapid walking.

Pedestrians passed him, pausing to glance back over their shoulders, wondering at the reason for his rapid pace. He gave no heed to them. He gave no heed to the multitude of doubts that seemed to be racing along beside him, clamoring at his mind for admission;

he only quickened his stride as if in an effort to leave them behind him forever.

But it was impossible to maintain so rapid a pace. It was impossible to outdistance those besetting doubts. His stride shortened at last, and moving to one side, he sank upon an empty bench, murmuring, "I 've got to settle it!"

Out there under the arching blue sky calmness and courage gradually returned to him. He was able to face the problem soberly and without self-pity. He repeated to himself what had always been in the back of his mind — that business as a career held no allure for him. How weak he had been to let the thought of money influence him even for a moment! What good was money if you were not satisfied with the way you were earning it, if you were not really happy? And how childish to become discouraged because the way to Annapolis seemed hard and long and uncertain! His chance of becoming a midshipman might be a slim one, but if he took it and failed, at least he would be able to say, "I did my best." There would be no remorse, no haunting regrets, as in the case

of his father and of Mr. Fisher. And then there was his mother. She would n't want him to quit. She would n't want him to take a job just for the sake of the money it might bring him!

Rodney closed his eyes, feeling as if an immense weight had lifted from his shoulders. The breeze from across the river was cool and refreshing against his face. At last he rose and started back along the embankment — and now his stride was measured and buoyant.

That evening he wrote the following letter:

"Dear Mr. Devereux:

"I have decided not to take advantage of your very kind offer to give me a start in business. I know I 'm just a boy, and I may be making a big mistake; I may not really know my own mind. But I have thought it all out as carefully as I can, and I feel sure I ought to go on the way I am, with the hope of entering the U. S. Naval Academy some day.

"I am afraid you may think me ungrateful. I 'm not. I am more than grateful, Mr. Devereux! But it 's just this way. I 've sort of

always had the notion of following the sea. First I thought I 'd be satisfied just to be in the merchant marine, but my mother urged me to aim at something higher. It was my mother who got me interested in Annapolis. We used to talk a lot about it, and I know she took it for granted I 'd be a naval officer some day. I feel sure if I gave it up now and went into business, I 'd always regret I had n't tried the Navy — and that would be bad. As I say, I may be wrong, but I hope you will understand.

Sincerely yours,
Rodney Owen."

He mailed the letter the next morning and then set out in quest of a job. He answered three or four advertisements, but met with no success. He wandered down to the market at Faneuil Hall and had lunch in one of the many little restaurants in the vicinity. The place was not much wider than a fair-sized hallway, and the stools along the counter were occupied almost wholly by men from the market — big florid-faced men, some wearing straw hats and linen

dusters, and all laughing and talking and consuming enormous quantities of food. "Good eaters," they were, those market men! Rodney asked one of them if he knew of a job thereabouts.

"You looking for a job?" The man took a tremendous bite from a huge roast-beef sandwich that he was obliged to hold in both hands. Then after a big swallow of coffee he added, "I see a sign, 'Boy Wanted', this morning over in Cornhill. It was in one of the bookstalls. You look 's if you might fit in better where there 's books than where there 's meat and veg'tables."

Rodney smiled. "What street was that on?" he asked.

"Over in Cornhill," was the reply. "You 'll find it, if it 's still there."

Rodney finished his lunch hastily and walked in the direction of Cornhill with its numerous second-hand bookshops. His heart gave a jump as he spied the sign in one of the windows.

He descended three or four stone steps and, opening the door, entered a low-ceilinged, musty-smelling, rectangular room crowded with books.

They filled all four walls; they covered three long tables in the center of the room; they lay haphazard in a great heap in one corner, almost cutting off the view of a small desk at which a gray-haired, youngish man with heavy bone-rimmed spectacles was writing. Here and there at the tables a man or a woman was thumbing a book or scrutinizing the titles of those that lay in the trays. The place was dim and quiet. The street noises penetrated only as a muffled roar.

Rodney approached the desk. "I saw your sign in the window," he said. "Is the job filled?"

The man peered at him in a near-sighted manner. "No, it is n't filled. You interested? What have you done?"

Rodney gave an account of his experience on the *Little Music Master*.

The man at the desk pondered for a few seconds. "How much would you work for?" he inquired.

Rodney hesitated, his lips pursed, his gaze fixed on the floor.

"I can't pay much," continued the other. "Fourteen dollars a week — long hours — six full days a week, except in the summer, when you could have Tuesday afternoon."

It was not very alluring, but Rodney had been out of work too long. "What would I have to do?" he asked.

"Wait on customers," was the reply. "Help arrange the books — miscellaneous tasks that I want done. I don't believe you 'd find it hard except for the long hours. The young fellow I had before was able to do some reading on the side; he was studying law."

The remark impressed Rodney. "I think I 'd like to try it," he said, "if you care to give me a chance."

"When could you start in?"

"Any time you 'd want me."

"All right, suppose you report in the morning — eight o'clock. Let 's see, what name?"

"Rodney Owen."

The man rose. "My name is John Dobson. I think we 'll be able to get along together," he added with a smile.

Rodney shook hands with him and went out, feeling that he might have found work much less to his liking.

He saw Ted Morris shortly after supper.

"Well, Rod, why that look of radiant happiness?" Ted demanded as his friend entered the room.

Rodney grinned. "I just thought I 'd drop in for a few minutes before school — let you know that in case you need any old books, I 'm in the second-hand business down in Cornhill — start work to-morrow at Dobson's."

"Good for you!" said Ted. Then he made a wry face. "Books! Gosh, I 've got so I hate the sight of them! Know why I 'm happy, Rod? My folks have just bought a summer place over on Martha's Vineyard. Think of it! A whole summer at the shore — swimming, fishing, boating! Listen, old man, there 's one thing you 've got to do this summer. I want you to spend a couple of weeks with me down there. You 'll like it, no doubt about that; and my people will be tickled to have you. I 've told them all about you — all your bad habits, you

know. Promise me you 'll come down — for two weeks, or longer if you can manage it."

Rodney was touched by his friend's kindness. "I certainly will, Ted!" he exclaimed. "I mean if I can get the time off —"

"You 'll get two weeks' vacation, won't you? Everybody does."

"I don't know," said Rodney. "Mr. Dobson did n't mention that. I 'll speak to him about it, though. You surely have a big heart!" he added in a burst of emotion.

"Rot!" said Ted. He looked up suddenly. "Say," he demanded, "what about Devereux?" Did n't he have anything to offer after all?"

"No," replied Rodney. "That is, yes and no," he added with a smile. Then he told of his interview with Mr. Devereux and of the letter that he had posted that morning.

Ted regarded his companion incredulously. "He offered you a chance like that and you turned it down!"

"It seemed the only thing to do," said Rodney. "Oh, it took an effort! The thing upset me completely for a while. But it was either busi-

ness or the Navy — and I plumped for the Navy. I may have made the great mistake of my life, but I reached the decision with a clear head, and I 'm not sorry."

Ted was silent; he only stared at his companion.

Rodney rose, smiling half-apologetically. "I s'pose you think I did a foolish thing. Maybe I did. But anyway, nobody will ever hear me squeal! The thing 's done; it 's past and over —"

"Yes," murmured Ted, "it 's past and over. But, Rod, old man, I salute you! You did what I could n't have done!"

The next morning Rodney began his duties at the bookshop. There was much to learn, but everything was interesting, and he put into his efforts an enthusiasm that his employer was quick to appreciate. Mr. Dobson was always kindly, always patient and ready to help, and Rodney soon formed a genuine liking for him.

A great many people came into the store every day, and a great many others paused on the sidewalk outside the door, scrutinizing the

books that were on display in several tiers of open shelves. Rodney was astonished at some of the people who bought second-hand books — well-dressed men and women with an air of prosperity about them, shabby old men who looked as if they had no knowledge of where the next penny was coming from, rough-handed workmen who always seemed to know just what they wanted. Besides, there were students from Harvard College and Boston University and Massachusetts Tech and the numerous other institutions of learning in or near the city, business men, doctors, professors, lawyers, men and women from all walks of life. He soon learned that some of them were regular frequenters of the shop and doubtless of the other bookstores in Cornhill. For the most part they merely came in and looked over the titles, sometimes going out without buying, sometimes choosing a book or a number of books and paying the price marked on the inside of the cover. There was no attempt at active selling.

Mr. Dobson, on the other hand, was constantly on the watch for new titles to add to his

supply, negotiating with the owners by telephone or by letter, and often going in person to the home of some one who had books to sell. At such times Rodney remained in sole charge of the shop. Gradually he learned the kind of books that were mostly in demand. He marveled at the number of travel books that were bought and the number of educational books as compared with books of fiction. It had never occurred to him before that there were so many people eager to learn. It was in a sense an inspiration to him; and, as Mr. Dobson had suggested, he was able to find time in the store for a little study almost every day. Rainy days as a rule brought fewer customers, and unless there was a particular task for him to do, such as sorting or rearranging books on the shelves, he was able, in bad weather, to put in some hard work on his studies.

In May his night classes closed. He had received no high grades, but he had passed in all his courses, and the thought was very encouraging. He figured that a year from the following spring he should be equipped to take

his examinations for Annapolis. Acting on Ted's suggestion, he wrote a letter to his congressman, setting forth his desire. To his surprise he received a letter in reply saying that there would be no vacancy until the year following that in which he planned to enter.

"Get after the two senators," Ted advised when Rodney told him about it. "I 'm all set for next February, and I won't be happy till you 're fixed for the following year. I only wish we could take the exams together and enter in the same class!"

"No chance of that," replied Rodney. "I 've got too much to learn!"

"Well, get after the two senators," Ted repeated.

Accordingly, Rodney wrote two more letters that night.

The following Friday evening he had a talk with Mr. Holman after the Scout meeting. The Scoutmaster listened with his usual interest when Rodney told of the outcome of his interview with Mr. Devereux.

"I felt rather mean about it," Rodney con-

cluded. "I realize that lots of fellows would be mighty pleased with the chance Mr. Devereux offered me. I can't help feeling that my letter did n't explain things, that it may have sounded as if I did n't appreciate the offer."

Mr. Holman smiled. "Don't you worry about that," he said. "Mr. Devereux understands. He is uncommonly shrewd, and there 's very little that escapes him. I 'm not at all sure he does n't think the better of you for deciding to stick to your original plan. There 's a whole lot, you know, in just being able to stick — like General Grant, for example. An even better example would be that of Mr. Devereux himself."

Rodney regarded him questioningly.

"Holbrook Devereux," the Scoutmaster went on, "was born poor. He, too, lost his parents at an early age and was obliged to make his way in the world. He had less schooling than you, getting almost all his education from the college of hard knocks. Some of those knocks would have floored a good many others. Devereux took them, standing up. He had a mind for

business, but more important than that, he had the will to forge ahead. I shan't tell you his life story, fascinating though it is ; it reads much like the life story of many other successful Americans. And Holbrook Devereux has n't reached the top yet. He has a number of good years ahead of him, possibly the best years of his life. His name, as you may know, is mentioned from time to time in the newspapers, in connection with one government post or another, and I expect one day Washington will pick him for some big job of usefulness and honor."

"I did n't know that !" Rodney gasped.

"No, you 'd never guess it just to look at him." Mr. Holman's eyes suddenly twinkled, and he added, "Would it have made a difference in your letter to him, Rodney, if you had known ?"

Rodney colored. "No, sir," he replied, "I — I was n't thinking of that at all."

"No, of course you were n't. I was only joking. By the way, I hope you 're going to have a vacation from selling books this summer. I have n't said anything about it yet to the Troop, but I 'm counting on a month or so in

camp near Mt. Monadnock, in New Hampshire. I hope you 'll be able to attend, at least for part of the time. What do you think?"

"I certainly want to!" replied Rodney. "I guess I 'm pretty lucky," he added. "Another fellow wants me to spend a couple of weeks at his summer place on Martha's Vineyard."

"That 's fine," said the Scoutmaster. "It would be nice if you could take advantage of both opportunities. You 've been working pretty hard. A vacation would do you good."

During the next few days Rodney's thoughts turned frequently to the prospect of a vacation either in the mountains or at the shore. Mr. Holman was right; he had been working pretty hard, and a vacation would do him good. He spoke to his employer about it one afternoon.

Mr. Dobson's face took on a doubtful expression. "I had n't planned on a vacation for you," he said. "You know, of course, it 's not customary to allow a vacation unless a person has been working at a place a year. You 've been here — well, not more than five or six weeks at the most."

Rodney tried to hide his disappointment. "All right, Mr. Dobson," he replied. "I did n't know."

"I tell you what I will do," Mr. Dobson continued. "Whenever it 's possible, I 'll try to arrange so that you 'll have a little more time than I 'd planned at first — maybe an extra afternoon or a full day off each week, if I can manage it. Would that help?" he asked with a hopeful smile.

"It 's very good of you," said Rodney; but at the same time into his mind flashed a picture of Ted Morris disporting himself, carefree and happy, at the beach, of the Scout Troop climbing mountains and hiking across country while he spent the warm summer days working for fourteen dollars a week in a stuffy bookshop. Well, there was no use pulling a long face; the only thing to do was to make the best of it.

"It just happens I 've got to be out of town a good bit this summer," Mr. Dobson went on. "Short trips, some of them overnight. Naturally I 've got to have somebody to look after the

store. Next summer, of course, I 'll try to arrange things differently."

Rodney suddenly smiled. "It 's quite all right, Mr. Dobson. I don't need a vacation for my health! I 've managed to keep fit — brisk walking, you know, regular hours, setting-up exercises in the morning. If you want to let me have a day now and then, I think I can manage to have a good time right here around Boston. There 's lots of it I have n't seen yet."

Rodney was more disappointed than he cared to admit even to himself, but he succeeded in fighting it down at last. After all, he was no worse off than hundreds of others, and there certainly was no injustice in the matter.

That evening when he returned home he found a letter awaiting him. It was from the junior senator, and it read very much like the letter from the congressman. The senator had no appointments open for Annapolis in the year in which Rodney hoped to enter. He was sorry, and he promised that if the situation should change, he would communicate with him again.

Rodney bit his lips. Two chances gone!

There remained only one more. If the senior senator also had no vacancy, then it would be three more years before he could take his examinations — three more years of waiting, of studying, of working for low wages — an extra year of marking time. The thought of that extra year struck at his courage; it seemed to put the goal completely out of sight. Well, there was nothing to do except wait and see. He ought to hear from the senior senator before much longer; perhaps his letter would be in every way favorable. Rodney decided to be hopeful.

A few days later Ted Morris finished his year's work at Dr. Masterson's private school, and the following morning he set off for home. On his way to the station he stopped at the bookshop to say good-by to his companion.

"I wish you were going with me, Rod!" he said as they shook hands. "Believe me, I 'd be willing to cut my vacation in half if I could share it with you! Can't you make the boss change his mind somehow?"

"I only wish I could! No chance, though, Ted."

"Well, then, if you could manage a long week-end —"

Rodney shook his head. "You 're a good fellow, Ted — one of the best I 've ever known. I know what you 're thinking. You 're thinking how tough it is for me to have to spend the summer here in town. I don't mind so much, honest, I don't! 'Course I 'd rather be with you down by the water, swimming and fishing and all that; but it really is n't so tough staying here. I 'll get away now and then for a swim, and maybe I 'll have almost as much fun as you 'll be having!"

"Huh," was the reply, "if you fell overboard in mid-ocean, I 'll bet you 'd try to convince yourself you were having a good time!" He pressed Rodney's hand again. "Well, good-by, Rod. I 'll think of you a lot."

"I 'll think of you a lot, Ted."

Yes, he would think of Ted a lot! He thought of him off and on all during the rest of the day and most of the evening. There was no envy in his contemplation of his friend; he did not in the least begrudge him the good for-

tune that was his; but he could not help contrasting Ted's lot with his own — well-to-do parents, the advantage of a private-school education, sufficient money for all his needs and a summer place at the shore. "He deserves it," Rodney said to himself. "It has n't spoiled him one bit."

"Well, Rodney," observed his uncle, smiling, "how is the second-hand book business going? Getting so you know all the tricks of the trade?"

"I 'm learning, Uncle Jonathan," was the reply. "Except for that dollar's difference in pay, I 'm better off than I was with that fellow Veresko. One thing I 'm sure of: Mr. Dobson is absolutely fair and square — nothing underhanded about him."

"Maybe you can stop work and enter high school again in the fall?" his uncle suggested. "We 're saving a little each week, Rodney; maybe if we could find a place where the rent was n't quite so much —" His voice trailed off, and he tapped his fingertips together meditatively.

"No, Uncle Jonathan," said Rodney, "I 'm

satisfied the way things are. We could n't do much better on the rent, and we both like it here. Please don't bother about me. Everything will work out finely."

The old man made no reply, but continued to tap his fingertips in the same meditative manner.

The next day Rodney received the expected letter from the senior senator; it was in a long envelope marked with the senator's name in place of a stamp. He held the envelope in his hands for several moments before opening it. This was his last chance, his last hope. Somehow he felt that it would prove unfavorable like the two others. The conviction grew upon him until his fingers began to tremble.

With the end of a pencil he broke the seal and spread the letter out. The trembling of his fingers increased as he read:

"My dear Mr. Owen:

"Under separate cover I am sending you two pamphlets which give full information concerning the Naval Academy. Unfortunately, unless there should be a vacancy caused

by resignation, or Congress should authorize by general law additional appointments, I shall not have a vacancy until after the year in which you were hoping to enter.

"You will, of course, let me know if there is more information that you require. I suggest that you get in touch with me after next May, if you are still interested —"

The words suddenly blurred before Rodney's eyes. His lips quivered, and he lay back in his chair. The letter slid to the floor, and he made no attempt to pick it up. He clenched his underlip hard between his teeth. Three more years — an extra year of marking time! Again the thought of the extra year struck at his courage. Was it worth while? Was it worth the sacrifice, the grind, the deadly monotony of waiting?

Never had he felt so much in need of friendly sympathy since he came to Boston. Disappointment after disappointment! It seemed they had become a natural part of his life, that he must go on facing one after another until his courage, his will, broke before the onslaught.

CHAPTER VII

CAP'N TUCKABERRY OF GLOUCESTER

Rodney picked up the letter and read it through again. It was clear enough. As matters stood, the senator could make no fresh appointments to the Naval Academy until the end of three years. Before the letter had arrived, he had thought of it as his last hope; now, after the first shock of disappointment, he found himself again hoping. Perhaps a vacancy would occur; perhaps some one whom the senator had named might drop out — or possibly Congress might authorize more appointments. Then it occurred to him that there were doubtless other fellows, like himself, who were hoping

for just the same thing. What likelihood was there that the senator would notify him even in the event that a vacancy did occur?

And then one afternoon, while glancing through the newspaper during a quiet period in the bookshop, he noted the name of the senior senator in one of the headlines. He was in the city, and during the day and part of the day following would be at his office on State Street.

Rodney's chin suddenly lifted. He rose abruptly, and crossing to the desk where Mr. Dobson was working, he said he should like to have part of the afternoon off. The bookseller looked up at him in surprise, observing the expression of mingled eagerness and resolution on his face.

"Something important?"

"Yes, Mr. Dobson."

"All right, go ahead."

A quarter of an hour later Rodney was one of several persons seated in a small outer office in a building on State Street. In reply to a secretary's query regarding his business with the senator, he had given his name and said that

he was eager to see him on a matter that had to do with the Naval Academy. Now, rather frightened at his own temerity, he waited with feet tucked under the chair and fingers nervously playing with the edge of his hat.

A woman came out of a glass-paneled door at the far end of the office, crossed the floor and went into the corridor. The secretary, a young, sharp-featured man in a blue suit, rose from his typewriter and entered the inner office. He came out a few seconds later and nodded to a man seated next to Rodney; the man jumped to his feet and hurried toward the glass-paneled door.

Rodney looked inquiringly at the secretary.

"He 'll see you," said the young man, and bent over his typewriter.

The remark, instead of causing Rodney pleasure, only added to his nervousness. His tongue suddenly clove to the roof of his mouth, and his hands felt cold and moist. Senators, public officials in high office, seemed to him personages far removed from his own prosaic life — awe-inspiring personages, coldly efficient, unfriendly.

Almost an hour passed, during which men and women one after another entered the glass-paneled door and, after varying lengths of time, came out again. At last it was Rodney's turn. His knees trembled as he got to his feet, and he was uncomfortably aware of a loose, dangling button on the front of his coat. He fingered it, and to his horror the button came off! His face turned crimson. He tugged at the edges of his coat; they would not stay together. Out of the corner of his eye he had a glimpse of the secretary grinning at him. It seemed a challenge, that grin, and Rodney accepted it. Thrusting the button into his pocket, he set his lips and entered the inner office.

A middle-aged man in a light gray suit was seated at a mahogany desk, smoking a cigar — a big, well-built man with gray hair, blue eyes and a broad, smooth forehead. He rose and, with a brief smile, stretched out his hand. "What can I do for you?" he asked and, sitting down again, motioned to a chair.

Rodney seated himself on the edge of it. "I came to see you, sir, about an appointment to

Annapolis," he began in a husky voice. "I wrote to you, and you said you would n't have a vacancy —"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, sir," continued Rodney, "if a vacancy occurs, if somebody drops out, I — I hope I 'll have a chance —" He moistened his lips and, suddenly forgetful of his nervousness, went on, "Maybe I ought not to take your time this way, but I wanted you to know how eager I am to get into the Naval Academy. I never wanted anything so much in my life!"

"Hm," observed the senator. "You probably have a couple more years of high school?"

"I 'm not at high school," replied Rodney. "I work. I 've been studying at night school and on the side."

The man appeared a little more interested. "That 's rather hard, I should think. How is it you 're not at high school?"

Rodney gave an account of the events that had brought about the great change in his life. He spoke without emotion, merely stating the essential facts; but the show of friendliness in

the manner of the man of whom he had stood in so much awe emboldened him to go into more details. The senator interrupted him occasionally with a question, and at length Rodney was almost at his ease.

"You 've known Mr. Devereux long?" the senator asked when Rodney spoke of the chance that he had turned down for the sake of his ambition.

"Oh, no, I met him only twice," was the reply, "but — but he seemed interested in me."

The senator blew a cloud of smoke into the air and rose to his feet. He held out his hand again. "I 'll keep you in mind," he said. "If there 's any change, I 'll communicate with you. I 'm glad you called. Good-by."

In the street again, Rodney drew a deep breath. The senator's parting words seemed to him perfunctory; nevertheless he was glad that he had met him. Now at least he was satisfied that senators were not the formidable personages he had imagined them.

Off and on during the rest of the afternoon at the bookshop he thought of the button that had

come off in his fingers. He was able to smile at the incident now; and he did not blame the secretary for grinning at him. How ridiculous he must have appeared, panic-stricken over a missing button! How Ted would laugh when he told him about it!

But the button had an effect of more or less importance in Rodney's life. It made him realize that he must spend some money on a new suit of clothes. Not only were there other loose buttons on his old suit, but the coat had grown rapidly more threadbare during his weeks at the bookshop, and the bottoms of his trouser legs, despite frequent trimmings with the shears, had a short fringe above his heels — "whiskers," as he thought of it.

On his first day off in July he went to the Old Colony Trust Company, on Court Street, where he kept his meager savings, and drew out twenty-five dollars. By dint of much shopping, he succeeded in finding a suit to his liking — a dark gray worsted that he could wear in all seasons. He was tempted to buy a new hat also, but finally decided that he could make his

old one do for another year; instead he bought a pair of tan shoes.

Hitherto he had never given much thought to the clothes he wore. Clothes were merely something to cover the body and keep a fellow warm; their style and color were of very slight importance. But the following evening, when his new suit arrived and he put it on, he was conscious of a little feeling of pride in himself — pride not only in his appearance, but also in the thought that he had purchased the suit out of money that he had earned.

The summer wore on, and about the middle of July the Scout Troop left town for six weeks in camp on the northern slope of Mt. Monadnock. Rodney happened to be in the subway at Park Street, returning from an errand, when he saw them waiting for a car to take them to the North Station. He felt a pang at his heart as he heard their boisterous laughter and noted the bulging haversacks they carried, the tennis rackets, the fishing-rods, the various pieces of baggage lying grouped on the concrete floor. Six weeks in camp! What fun they would have! He felt

that he ought to go forward and wish them a fine summer, but he could not quite bring himself to the point of doing it; he was afraid his voice might tremble, or he might betray in some other manner how badly he felt at not being able to accompany them.

A North Station car clattered up the incline, and he heard Ken Cauffman shout, "Grab your junk, fellows! Here 's our boat!"

Rodney watched them get on the car, Ken Cauffman first, then Henry Basset, then the rest of them, with Mr. Holman last of all.

"Lucky kids!" some one exclaimed as the car started.

Yes, Rodney said to himself, they were lucky! Well, maybe he could manage to get a couple of weeks in camp next summer.

His work at the bookshop continued much as usual; the season was fairly quiet, and every day he was able to study. Mr. Dobson remained true to his word and saw to it that Rodney had at least one full day off a week exclusive of Sundays.

On such free days he usually spent a part of

the morning reading history or literature or working on problems in mathematics or physics. He had mastered the habit of study by now; it seemed to him that he had mastered it from necessity, just as he had learned to do so many other things since the death of his mother. At times, as formerly, he found it hard to concentrate on a book, especially if the weather were uncomfortably warm, or the street noises disturbing, or if the east wind were blowing, bringing with it that strange, disquieting odor which had moved him so powerfully on the day of his arrival. Nevertheless, despite distractions of one sort or another, he did manage to go on step by step in his studies, slowly and with dogged method.

On some of his free days, with a bit of studying done, he liked to go to one of the beaches for a swim, or to ramble about the city and its suburbs — to Cambridge or to the Navy Yard at Charlestown, where the historic frigate, "Old Ironsides", was moored — returning in the evening, healthfully tired. Like Beacon Hill, Boston seemed to him to have a soul, a kind of

subtle influence that at times appeared to lift him out of himself. The city was so old, as cities go in America; so many events of historic importance had occurred there; so many patriots had been born there, or had walked its crooked streets, or lay buried in its quaint cemeteries — Franklin, Washington, Hancock, Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, and a host of others.

One warm, sultry afternoon in August, Rodney's love of wandering carried him down to the big fish pier, in South Boston. His first impression of it was one of vast magnitude and activity, and he was ready to believe what a pedestrian of whom he had inquired the way had told him — that it was the "greatest fish pier in the world." Four three-storied brick and concrete buildings formed a long rectangle that jutted far out into the water, and the broad, cobble-stoned space between was filled with wagons, trucks, automobiles, two-wheeled carts heaped with fish; boxes and barrels; men in rough denim coats and trousers or oilskins moving about, busy at a variety of tasks. Carts of cod or haddock or halibut were drawn up in

front of small doorways at regular intervals on both of the long sides of the rectangle, and men with long-handled, three-pronged forks were spearing the fish and transferring them to boxes or to other carts or wagons. He noted the names of the different dealers stenciled in black letters above each doorway — A. F. Rich and Co., Arnold and Winsor, Freeman and Cobb, Cassius Hunt, L. B. Goodspeed, J. Adams and Co. — old Yankee names with few exceptions.

The odor of fish was heavy on the air; the stones under foot were slippery with water and slime and pieces of cracked ice. It was not the best place for a boy in a new suit and new shoes, but Rodney was too much interested to think of his clothes. He made his way toward the far end of the rectangle and then went through an archway to the outer side. There he saw a sight that thrilled him to the tips of his toes. Close against the whole length of the wharf lay a line of fishing smacks, small two-masted schooners mostly, many of them fresh from the fishing banks. Here the carts and wagons were more numerous than inside, and the smell of

Close against the whole length of the wharf lay a line of fishing smacks.

fish was stronger. Most of the boats were being unloaded, and Rodney paused beside one of them to watch.

"How many to-day?" some one called to a fisherman on the boat.

"Nineteen thousand," was the indifferent reply.

"Seems like a lot," Rodney observed to a young man standing near by.

"He means pounds," was the reply.

A fisherman in hip boots, standing, pipe in mouth, near the mast, pulled a lever. A gasoline engine started with a hollow roar, and out of the hold came a huge basket suspended from a line that led up to a pulley fastened to the gaff. The basket was full of fish, the scales of which glistened with particles of ice and rock salt. A man in oilskins, plastered all over with fish scales, gave it a push that swung it toward two other men on the dock. They caught it and emptied it into a partly-filled cart. Then back it swung; the engine roared, and down it went into the hold for a fresh supply.

"What kind are they?" Rodney asked the young man.

"Haddock," was the reply. "Takes away my appetite for fish just to look at them."

"You work here?"

"Not on your life! Do my clothes look it? Just came down from the *Globe* office to get a Sunday story."

He strolled off after a few minutes, and Rodney remained standing there, watching basket after basket full of glistening haddock come leaping out of the hold; watching the men on the dock fork the fish from the cart into boxes resting on scales; moving aside as other carts splashed past him. Wet, slimy work it was, but Rodney saw only the romance of it. Those broad-shouldered, sun-browned men in boots and oil-skins and sou'westers went out to the banks in all kinds of weather, more at home on the sea perhaps than on the land. They fished for long hours and then sailed into Boston Harbor with such a catch as that — nineteen thousand pounds! The dealers weighed the fish and bought them; they sent them to the hotels and restaurants and to the local dealers in and about the city, and people ate them fried or

broiled or baked, with perhaps no thought for the manner in which they had reached the table. Yes, in spite of the slime and the odor, it was romance!

Rodney saw the reporter again a few minutes later and asked him whether the fish came from the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

"No," was the reply, "the boats don't need to go as far as that. These fish come from George's Bank, off the Cape, and from other banks still nearer than that. Take a look at those fellows," he added, pointing toward a group of fisherman. "Yankees, all of them — blue eyes, brown hair — some from Gloucester, some from Rockport, and other towns along the north shore. Well, they're welcome to the job! So long!" and he hurried away.

Rodney observed the men with new interest. Yes, they were mostly all Yankees — Yankees and fishermen, like his own ancestors on his mother's side, those ancestors who had handed down to him a taste for the sea.

He strolled along the dock. Gulls screamed

overhead, swooping frequently to snatch up a piece of fish that had drifted away from the pier. Here and there a boat was making ready to go out. Fishermen were winding heavy lines inside wicker baskets, or baiting hooks with pieces of fish, or vigorously swabbing off decks, all talking and laughing as they worked. No matter what they were doing, they looked to Rodney happy, satisfied with their hard life; and his mind reverted constantly to those various Eldreds who had followed the sea in just such a manner.

He continued on until he was at the extreme end of the pier. Here there were no boats, and standing near the edge, he had the momentary illusion that the pier itself was a vessel speeding into the waves that came racing toward it. He gazed about the harbor — at the little green islands far off, at the screaming, swooping gulls, at the steamers and other craft lying in the slips, at the black smoke drifting like a pall over the water front. From the direction of the outer harbor a motor-driven dory was moving swiftly toward the pier, rising and falling on the waves.

There were two men in it, clad in oilskins and sou'westers.

Rodney observed, as the dory drew nearer, that a quantity of fish of some kind gleamed in a box in the waist of the craft. A few yards from the pier the man at the wheel — an elderly, stockily-built man with gray, stubby whiskers — shut off the motor and, standing up, drew a short brier pipe from beneath his oilskin. He proceeded calmly to fill it as the other, a young man perhaps in his middle twenties, made his way to the bow and waited, rope in hand, for the boat to drift against the pier. When it touched, the young man secured his line to a support and grasped one rung of a metal ladder that led up close to where Rodney was standing.

The old fisherman leaned over and struck a match on the gunwale. Just as he was applying it to the tobacco, with both hands cupped round the bowl, the other swung upward on the ladder. His movement caused the dory to jerk sidewise — a sharp jerk that sent the old fisherman off his balance. With a gasp of surprise Rodney

saw him claw the air ; the next instant he landed with a splash in the water and disappeared.

It happened so suddenly that for a few seconds Rodney could only stare downward. He was vaguely aware of the young man halfway up the ladder staring also with round, startled eyes. He was aware of the empty dory bobbing about on the waves and of a multitude of tiny bubbles where the fisherman had sunk. Then suddenly the man on the ladder started downward in frantic haste.

At that moment the gray head of the old fisherman came to the surface half a score of yards from the pier. His hands beat the water, and then he sank again.

"Man overboard!" came a hoarse cry from down the pier.

Rodney's wits suddenly returned to him. Without a thought for his new suit and new shoes, he jumped. A rush of air took his breath away. He hit the water with knees drawn up. He kicked frantically. When he came to the surface he struck out with vigorous overhand strokes for the spot where he had last seen the

fisherman. He reached it, passed it, paused to tread water, casting swift glances all about him. The man was nowhere in sight.

A burst of shouting reached his ears. The next instant he had a glimpse of greenish yellow in the water at his right. He struck out towards it with all his strength. It began to grow fainter. A wave spilled its crest in his face, momentarily blinding him. Then he spied the patch of yellow again. He reached it in three or four strokes. The fingers of his left hand closed upon it. He dragged upward, treading water furiously. The old man's head came above the surface, and it seemed to Rodney that he had never in his life seen a pair of eyes so intensely blue. And then before he knew it a muscular arm closed round his neck, and he went under water, choking.

Rodney did not lose his presence of mind. Out on the Ohio River, along with the other members of Mr. Fisher's Troop, he had often practiced rescuing a drowning person. What he had learned there he now did mechanically. Still treading water, he brought his right hand upward against the throat of the fisherman and

pressed outward with all his might. The man's hold loosened, and a few seconds later they came to the surface again. Rodney got behind him, clinging to the collar of his oilskin; in that manner he remained, making no attempt to swim, content merely to keep afloat until help arrived.

A few moments later, with a feeling of intense relief, he grasped the rail of a dory and peered up at the anxious face of the second fisherman. The young man dragged his companion aboard and then helped Rodney to climb in.

"By Godfrey!" he cried. "That was a close call fer you, cap'n!"

The old man, slumped in the stern, made no reply. He blinked his eyes, breathing heavily, while little rivulets of salt water ran from his plastered gray hair down his wrinkled face.

Rodney was content to sprawl, panting, across one of the seats as the dory nosed its way back toward the pier. He was shivering from head to foot, and his thoughts were incongruous, even comical, in the circumstances. He was thinking

of his new suit, his new shoes, wondering if they were completely ruined.

Half an hour later Rodney sat, wrapped in a blanket, in a room above one of the fish stalls. A boy who worked about the place had taken his wet clothes to a tailor, promising to bring them back dry and pressed and as good as new. But Rodney's thoughts were not on his clothes now. Seated in a shaft of sunlight streaming in through a grease-stained window, he was living over again the events of the past half-hour — the handclasps, the words of hearty approval from the lips of the fisherman and workers as they helped him up the ladder to the pier, the glances of admiration from the younger men, the whole-hearted praise for his skill in the water, the look in the old fisherman's eyes — Cap'n Tuckaberry, they had called him — as he seized his rescuer's hand and squeezed it with a vigor that made the bones crunch. "Lad, ye saved my life!" Rodney repeated the old man's words to himself. The fisherman had said other things, too, but it was those five words, uttered in a husky voice, that he remembered most vividly. They seemed

to send a warm glow through his body, to give to his mind a sense of infinite satisfaction. He had saved another person's life, saved it at the risk of his own! He had done a thing that somehow he had half-believed happened only in stories! And now, down there on the pier, men were talking about it.

While Rodney sat in pleasant meditation, the stairway creaked, and presently the old fisherman entered the room, looking none the worse for his submersion. He strode with a rolling gait to where Rodney was sitting and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Lad," he said, "I wa' n't able to tell ye a while back all was in my mind. I reckon I was a bit upsot, as ye 'd say." He began to fumble beneath the folds of his oilskin, adding, "I owe ye somethin' —"

"No, captain, you don't owe me anything," Rodney interrupted him quickly.

The old man paused, noting the look in Rodney's face. Then he slowly withdrew his hand. The multitude of tiny wrinkles deepened round his eyes. He stood awkwardly, uncertainly, for

a few moments. At last he said, "I 'd like to give ye somethin'. Ain't nothin' I p'sess I would n't be glad an' willin' to give ye! I ain't what ye 'd call well off, but — looky here, lad!" he added, brightening. "Let me give ye what it 'd take to buy ye a new outfit!"

Rodney shook his head. "My clothes will be as good as ever when they come back. It 's kind of you, captain, but I don't want anything, and I could n't take anything."

The fisherman scratched his whiskers nervously, and his eyes held a worried, disappointed look as he studied the boards of the floor.

Rodney shifted his feet uncomfortably. A reward of any kind was unthinkable. He was a Scout, and the Scout Law forbade it. Moreover, he felt instinctively that a reward would spoil everything, drive from his mind that sense of pride and satisfaction which he found so pleasant. Yet he had no wish to see the old fisherman ill at ease.

"Captain," he said, moved by a sudden thought, "there 's one thing I would like. If

you 'd let me go out fishing with you sometime — just let me help you catch some fish —"

"By Gad!" exclaimed the captain. "I 'll be right pleased to have ye! That I will! My home 's down Gloucester way," he added, "which I reckon is why I never learned to swim, the water there bein' so cold. I don't get to Boston more 'n a few times each year; Jeffrey's Bank, off Gloucester, is where I fish mostly. Ye can go back with me, lad, if ye 've a mind to. My wife, she 'll put ye up an' glad o' the chance —"

"I could n't go back with you, captain," said Rodney; "I have to work. But maybe sometime —"

"Ye 'll have to come to Gloucester!" Captain Tuckaberry said emphatically. "An' ye can't come too soon!" he added. "Just ask fer Cap'n Nate Tuckaberry — anybody 'll tell ye where my house is. We 'll go out together, you an' me, and we 'll go shares on the catch —"

"No," said Rodney, "I was n't thinking of that. I 'd just like to go for the fun of it."

"Well, lad, ye can do as ye 've a mind to.

But ye won't fergit, will ye? Gad, if I don't think ye 've got the look o' the sea about ye, settin' there — it 's in yer eyes, sort of."

Rodney felt a little thrill of pleasure. "I hope to enter the Navy," he said, coloring.

"Do ye, now? Well, I thought I see it in yer eyes somehow."

"My mother's people were fishermen," continued Rodney.

"Aye, it 's in yer blood, then. Well, now, ye 're sure ye won't fergit? Ye won't fergit ol' Cap'n Tuckaberry o' Gloucester — him who owes ye his life?"

"I certainly won't!"

"That 's right, that 's right!" the old man said approvingly.

It was well past sunset when the boy returned with Rodney's clothes. The tailor had done the job for a dollar and a half, and he had done it well. Rodney did not begrudge the money or the half dollar he gave to the boy for his trouble. And later, when he was on his way toward home, he was still elated over his adventure and delighted with the outcome of it. He

had saved a life and made a friend. What could be better than that?

As he strode along in his wet shoes he pictured himself on the banks with Captain Tuckaberry, fishing for cod or haddock or flounders, following the calling of the Eldreds, facing the perils that they had experienced. At that moment the future seemed to him bright with romance!

CHAPTER VIII

EXAMINATIONS FOR ANNAPOLIS

Rodney succeeded in visiting Gloucester once before the end of the summer, and the day he spent there was one of the bright spots of his life — a day of fishing from a small boat out of sight of land. He and Captain Tuckaberry made a fair catch of flounders, returning at nightfall, tired and ravenously hungry, to the low-studded, weather-stained, shingled house that the captain and his wife had occupied for the past thirty years.

Mrs. Tuckaberry was a wrinkled, severely plain little woman with gray hair and smiling blue eyes behind steel-rimmed spectacles. She

and her husband had no children, and it seemed to Rodney, as he seated himself at table with them to a meal of fried flounders, that they treated him quite as if he were their own son, calling him "Rodney" and listening with sympathy and interest to all that he said. He was at his ease with such people, and it was not long before he had told them all about himself — the loss of his mother, his work in Boston, his hope of one day becoming a naval officer, and many other things. When he was about to leave for his train, Mrs. Tuckaberry kissed him as she might have kissed her own departing son, saying, "Ye 'll come again, now won't ye, Rodney?"

The thought of fishing had alone taken Rodney there that day, but on his way home it was the memory of Mrs. Tuckaberry's embrace that he cherished above all else. It was so natural and loving, that embrace — the kiss of a kindly, motherly woman. Somehow it made the memory of his own mother dearer than ever. Yes, he would go again to Gloucester!

A year had now passed, and it was autumn

once more on Beacon Hill — autumn with warm, still days and cool evenings, blue cloud-flecked skies and brilliant sunsets over the Charles River. Rodney was at night school again, already hard at work on his second year; and Ted Morris, tanned the color of an autumn leaf after his summer at the Vineyard, was back at Dr. Masterson's private school.

"The cats are still here, Rod," he observed, grinning toward the window of his room. "Listen carefully and I 'll bet you can make out three distinct voices, all melodious of course." It was Sunday evening, and the two friends had just returned from a brisk walk along the esplanade.

"Yes," replied Rodney, smiling, "I guess the cats of Beacon Hill spent their summer in Boston. They 're like me."

"Too bad you could n't have taken a few of them up to Gloucester with you that time," remarked Ted. "They 'd have enjoyed the fishing. I 'll bet that 's why they 're howling now, because you did n't take 'em. Say," he added, "you never told me how you happened to get next to the old captain."

Rodney colored slightly; thus far he had told no one of his plunge into the harbor. "Why — why, the fact is, Ted, I happened to pull him out of the water one day down at the fish pier," he said awkwardly.

"You saved his life?" cried Ted, wide-eyed.

"Well, maybe. He seems to think so, anyway."

"Rod! You silent oyster! Tell me about it!" Ted leaned eagerly forward.

Rodney laughed deprecatingly. "Nothing much to tell. He tumbled overboard, and I went in after him, that 's about all. Anybody would have done it. I just happened to be there."

"Boy, you were there, all right!" exclaimed Ted admiringly. "What happened afterward? Did n't you get a write-up in the papers?"

Rodney grinned and shook his head. "Funny, I 'd been talking with a *Globe* reporter not long before it happened. He 'd gone, though, when the captain fell into the water. I was certainly glad he was n't there!"

"I 'll say you deserved a write-up! Yes, and

your picture in the paper, and a Carnegie medal to boot! I would n't have been satisfied with less!"

Rodney shrugged his shoulders. "I 'd rather not have people make a fuss over me," he replied.

"Modest boy!" said Ted, grinning. "Makes me think of the man in the story. He pulled the town loafer out of the canal, and there was a lot of blah-blah stuff about it in the local paper, and everybody called him a hero and fussed over him till he actually felt miserable and ashamed. Finally they gave a banquet in his honor, and of course he had to speak. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'I 'll tell you exactly why I saved Lem Lufkin's life. He owed me two dollars. If it had n't been for that, I 'd have let him drown!'"

Rodney grinned. "Some hero! But I 'll say it served them right!" After a pause he added, "Well, Ted, what about next spring? All set for your exams?"

Ted frowned, then smiled. "Oh, sure, I 'm all set — that is, I will be all set in February. I 'm sorry about you, though. It certainly must be

nerve-racking not to know whether you 'll get an appointment or not. Do you think the senator really meant it when he said he 'd keep you in mind?"

"I certainly hope so."

"Well, keep on hoping," Ted advised him. "If you don't get a straight appointment, you might get the chance to take the exams as an alternate. Somebody might flunk out, you know, and then if you passed, you 'd be a midshipman. Slim chance maybe, — like waiting for the boss to die, so you can step into his shoes, — but anyway it 's a chance."

Autumn wore on, and Rodney continued to work and study, keeping himself in good physical trim, finding relaxation and recreation in the company of his brother Scouts. Every one in the Troop was interested in the struggle he was making; it had come to be a matter of Troop pride that one of their number was studying for Annapolis. They frequently asked him whether he had got his appointment and how he felt about passing the examinations. "When you hit 'em, hit 'em hard, Rod!" Ken Cauffman

observed one evening. "Yes," added another boy, "we 're pulling for you, Rod — honor of the Troop, you know! Gosh, the way you 've been studying, I 'll bet you 'll knock every question cold!"

So much friendly interest, so much loyalty and confidence in him, helped Rodney to go on. His days at the bookshop were long and wearisome; his evenings of school and study often were hard to get through, requiring tremendous effort; but on Friday night, at the Scout Headquarters above Mr. Holman's garage, he found fresh courage, fresh inspiration, to carry him forward into the next week.

Christmas passed, and with the start of the new year Rodney received a letter from the senior senator. In it he said there was a possibility that one of his appointees for the year in which Rodney hoped to enter the Naval Academy would not be able to take the examinations. In such a case the senator said he would hold a special competitive examination to decide upon the appointment. He would let him know definitely as soon as possible.

The news sent Rodney hurrying down the street to Ted's. For the first time he found him bent over his desk, studying; and for the first time also Ted's response to his friend's greeting was lacking in enthusiasm.

"What 's the matter?" Rodney asked in surprise.

Ted stared morosely at the floor. At last he lifted his head and met Rodney's eyes. "I 'm worried, that 's what 's the matter with me."

"Worried? Not about the exams, Ted!"

"Yes, I am! It 's the only thing in the world I 've got to worry about. No, don't go, Rod, sit down," he added, motioning toward the window seat. There was bitter self-reproach in his voice as he continued, "Rod, I 've been a fool, and nobody knows it better than I do. All my life I 've been a loafer. I 've loafed when I ought to have studied. Only this afternoon, when I picked up this math book and started to look over some of the back problems, I realized how absolutely little I know about the stuff. I 'll never in the world be able to pass an exam in it."

"Aw, Ted, I don't believe that," protested Rodney. "You 're up with the rest of your class at school, are n't you ?"

"Oh, yes, — on paper," Ted replied vehemently. "I 've got a quick perception and a surface knowledge of things, and I 've managed to get by — anybody could at Masterson's, unless he was downright stupid. I 'm not that. Have you looked over some of the sample exams for Annapolis ?" he asked gloomily.

"Yes. Some of them seem pretty stiff to me."

"You 're right they 're stiff !" Ted slumped in his chair and crossed his hands behind his neck. "Rod," he said, "if I flunk out on those Annapolis exams, I — I don't know what I 'll do ! I — I — honest, I 'll feel so sick and ashamed, I 'll want to drop through the earth !"

"But you won't flunk out !" Rodney protested. "You 've just got a case of nerves, that 's all. Listen, Ted, there 's a full month or more before the big day ; you can learn a lot in a month. Let 's study together. You 're a little ahead of me in math, I know, but I like the stuff, and maybe I can help —"

"I was going to help you," Ted replied bitterly. "I never did, though. When I think of the hard time you 're having, Rod, I wish somebody would kick me. Here I am at a private school — lots of leisure — no worries — everything fine. What 's it mean to me? Nothing — absolutely nothing!"

"Oh, cheer up!" said Rodney, patting his friend's shoulder. "Go out and take a fast walk, then go to bed. In the morning you 'll be a different fellow. I know, because I 've tried it."

Ted made no reply, but only stared into space.

Rodney's thoughts were on his companion throughout the rest of the evening. It was the first time he had ever known Ted Morris to be thoroughly downhearted. But he could not believe that things were as bad as Ted had pictured them. Everybody was apt to be a bit pessimistic at times.

On his next free evening Rodney went to his friend's room again, resolved to help him as best he could with his mathematics and to cheer him up if need be. But Ted needed no cheering up;

he was himself again, bright, humorous, optimistic.

"Say!" he greeted Rodney. "I certainly was a jackass the other night! Honest, was n't I, though! I 've been looking over some more of those sample exams — they 're really not so bad. A lot of the questions I could kill with a stroke of the pen. Pen's mightier than the sword, you know — even mightier than one of those big naval guns that you and I will be pointing at the enemies of our country sometime."

"I 'm glad to hear you talk that way!" exclaimed Rodney.

Ted grinned. "I did what you told me to — a fast walk, then to bed. In the morning — behold! I felt as if I could be President of the United States if the job were a matter of competitive examinations, as it should be."

"Just the same," observed Rodney, "don't you think we 'd better do a little studying for Annapolis? That 's why I dropped around."

"Not to-night, my boy!" was the emphatic reply. "I 've worked hard all afternoon —

really worked! Too much of it is bad for the bean, you know. Many a bean has been ruined by too much studying."

"I guess mine must be unusually tough," said Rodney, smiling.

He passed a pleasant hour with his companion, and when he returned home, it was with the feeling that Ted had very little cause for worry on the score of examinations. With his certificate from Dr. Masterson's school, he would need to take only two — one in English and the other in mathematics. Certainly Ted should have no trouble with English; nor could Rodney believe that mathematics would prove a stumbling block.

The day of the test was set for the third Wednesday in February. On the evening preceding it Rodney, returning from work, found a letter awaiting him from the senator. It was brief and businesslike. The appointee, whom he had written about, had decided to go on with his plans after all. There was, of course, a chance that some one might drop out, and he would let Rodney know in case of a vacancy.

Rodney bit his lips. His hopes had mounted,

and now they were dashed to the ground again. But he managed to keep his disappointment hidden from his uncle, managed somehow to regain his courage and put in an hour of studying before he went to bed. He purposely refrained from going to see Ted, feeling that his companion would be hard at work preparing for the ordeal on the morrow.

Throughout the next day Rodney thought of Ted. In the morning he pictured him bent over his mathematics problems; in the afternoon he imagined him perhaps smiling to himself as he answered the questions on his English paper. It was a day of suspense for Rodney, so eager was he for his friend to pass.

After work he hurried toward Beacon Hill, with no thought for supper. Reaching Ted's lodging house, he mounted the stairs three steps at a time and knocked at the door. There was no response, and he knocked again. Still there was no response. Finally he decided that Ted had gone out to supper, and he started down the stairway.

When he reached the second landing, a door

opened, and a woman's voice — the voice of the landlady — said, "You want Mr. Morris?"

"Yes," replied Rodney.

"Mr. Morris left around noontime," said the woman. "He gave up his room."

Rodney stared at her, bewildered.

"He — he gave up his room?"

"Are you Mr. Owen?" inquired the woman.

"Yes."

"Just a moment. He left a note to give to you in case you called." She went back into the room, returning presently with an envelope, which she placed in Rodney's hands. "He got bad news, I think, and went home," she added.

Rodney read the note beneath the flickering gas jet in the lower hall:

"Dear Rod: These lines in haste, because I 'm leaving town — for good! I flunked — math too much for me — walked out in the midst of the exam — no use prolonging the agony. Don't know what I 'll do — write you later. Never forget you, Rod! Yours, Ted."

Rodney stood for a few moments as if stunned. He had not expected Ted to fail; in spite of his friend's gloomy presentiment of the month before, he had felt certain that Ted would "get by" somehow. A stiff exam, that was what it must have been — one of those brutal papers that anybody is apt to run up against. Poor Ted! How badly he must have felt to have rushed off like that, unwilling even to face his best friend! Disappointment, humiliation, self-reproach — all those things Ted must be suffering. "Foolish boy!" murmured Rodney — but he longed to comfort him.

As he made his way slowly up the street, he resolved that, as soon as he learned Ted 's address, he would write him a long letter urging him to try again. After all, defeat was no disgrace; the only disgrace was in letting yourself remain beaten while there was a chance to rally. Had n't he always said that? Well, he would point it out to old Ted, do his best to make him take at least one more try at the Naval Academy.

It was not until early summer that Rodney heard from his friend. In his letter Ted made

no reference whatsoever to Annapolis or to the examinations for entrance. He was in New York, working for an export corporation; and he observed half-humorously, half-apologetically that he had got the job through a friend of his father's, that it was a good job with a future, and he hoped to learn to like it. He thought it would prove more likable in proportion to the number of increases in his salary. He concluded with his impressions of the city and the hope that he might see Rodney again before the year was out. Underneath his signature was the postscript: "My regards to the cats of Beacon Hill. How I miss them!"

Rodney wondered if Ted did not miss other things besides the cats of Beacon Hill. That evening he wrote to him as he had planned, and posted the letter before he went to bed.

A few days later he made a week-end trip to Gloucester. This time he stayed overnight with his friends, the Tuckaberrys, returning Sunday evening, feeling that his visit had been well worth while. He considered it a "good turn" — yes, more than that when he remem-

bered how eagerly they had come forth to welcome him as he strode down the shell-strewn path toward the little shingled cottage.

The next evening Uncle Jonathan approached his nephew with a mysterious air, bearing in his hand a small notebook. There was something childlike in the old man's expression as he spread the book open and handed it to Rodney, saying, "Take a look at these items, and tell me what you think of them."

Rodney scrutinized his uncle's neat handwriting. At one side of the page was a list of dates with names and figures opposite them: "Oct. 17th, Mr. J. L. Curtiss, $25.00"; "Nov. 2nd, Mrs. Cornelia Jones, $7.00"; and so on.

Uncle Jonathan chuckled as his nephew looked up at him inquiringly. "I 've been doing a bit of work, Rodney," he said. "Without your knowing it, I put an advertisement in one of the genealogical papers last fall, and it 's brought me a bit of work. I 've been looking up ancestors for folks, and they 've paid me for it! I 've earned almost two hundred dollars that way, and I don't see why I should n't earn more.

It 's not much trouble," he went on deprecatingly. "It just means I put less time on the Eldred line, that 's all — and, Rodney, don't you think it would be wise for you to go back to high school again next September ?"

Rodney smiled at his uncle in spite of the lump that had come into his throat. Go back to high school ? Give up his job and let his uncle try pathetically to earn enough to keep them both ? No, he could not do that ! But he only replied, still smiling, "You surely are good and kind and thoughtful, Uncle Jonathan ! When high school opens — well, we 'll just wait and see."

Rodney spent a good deal of time at the various beaches that summer, managing to get away to Revere and Nantasket or to the foot of L Street once or twice every week. He had always loved swimming — the sense of freedom it gave him, the stimulating effect of the cold water, the warm, pleasant glow that followed a dip. He perfected his skill, trying out new strokes and new kicks, and strengthening his powers of endurance ; and he was never happier than when

he was at Revere, with a heavy surf rolling in. That was swimming!

In August he had two weeks' vacation from his work at Mr. Dobson's, and, after carefully reckoning expenses, he decided to spend the second week in camp with his brother Scouts; they were in New Hampshire again, on the old camp site.

The whole Troop met him at the station — met him with a gusto that brought the color to his cheeks. It proved to be a glorious week of hikes and games, of swimming and fishing and of inspiring talks round the evening camp fire. There were times when he had only to close his eyes in order to imagine himself back in Ohio, in camp with his old Troop, the two sets of fellows were so much alike. Only the scenery was essentially different, with the blue-gray summit of Monadnock thrusting toward the sky. Rodney liked to think of the numerous Scout camps that dotted the country from coast to coast — in the mountains, on the plains, beside lakes and rivers. And he thought of the Sea Scouts, cruising the blue waters. He supposed he

would have been a Sea Scout if he had lived his early life near salt water or one of the Great Lakes. Well, it did n't matter much, only it made him realize how a fellow's surroundings are apt to determine what he does.

The memory of that week in camp remained vivid in Rodney's mind for many days. Without his realizing it, perhaps, his brief vacation had strengthened him both mentally and physically for the fight that he was making.

His appearance had changed somewhat during the past two years. Clean, wholesome living, plenty of sleep each night, and sufficient exercise had had their natural results. He had gained perhaps an inch in height and had added ten pounds to his weight ; but he was hard and lean, his shoulders a little broader, his chest deeper, his whole body under perfect control. And his skin was pink and clear — the skin of an athlete in training. He could have played a strenuous game of basketball at a moment's notice and without the slightest ill effect. There was also a look about him that bespoke increasing ma-

turity — a look of mental alertness and, above all, of frankness.

He did not enter high school in the fall. In September, when night school began, he took up the grind once more, working, studying, trying to keep his head up. But there were still occasions when he had his black moods of depression, when the loss of his mother was acutely painful, and when it seemed that all his studying might be in vain, that his longed-for appointment never would come through. Ted's failure also appeared to him now more significant than it had at first. Ted was naturally bright; he had had every advantage that a fellow could wish for, and yet he had failed. At times Rodney would ask himself what chance he had of passing a set of stiff examinations, granting that he did get his appointment — what chance for him when a fellow like Ted had failed? He felt that he was making a losing fight, but he would not quit.

One evening following a Scout meeting Mr. Holman surprised him by saying, "What do you plan to do, Rodney, in case luck

goes against you and you don't get into Annapolis?"

"I 've made no plans," was the reply. "I — I 've sort of kept myself from thinking about it."

"The Navy still appeals to you as strongly as ever?"

"Yes, Mr. Holman."

"Yet you 're not by nature belligerent," observed the Scoutmaster, smiling.

"No," agreed Rodney, "the last thing I want to do is to fight, though I would if I had to! But the Army and the Navy seem necessary, and they 're both very useful even in peace times."

"Yes, that is true. So long as the world is ruled by men who lack the vision and, above all, the courage to bring about lasting world peace, we shall need our Army and Navy; and in both there are opportunities for a man to do much good, especially in peace time, as you suggest. But what I had in mind was this: if you should fail to get your appointment, if you should change your mind, I feel sure that Mr. Devereux would be interested to hear from

you again. I know it won't turn your head if I remind you that you impressed him very favorably."

Rodney was silent, embarrassed, and rather troubled. It seemed at that moment as if the future were plain before him. He would miss his appointment or, if he got it, fail to pass his examinations, and then he would have the same problem to face — the choice of a good business opportunity or of continuing to strive for the ephemeral goal of his ambition. With the example of Ted Morris vivid in his memory, he felt suddenly as if he must do as Ted had done.

"It 's good of you, Mr. Holman, to take such an interest in me," he replied. "I suppose I really ought to begin to think of something besides Annapolis."

"But meanwhile keep up the fight!" advised the Scoutmaster.

Rodney did keep up the fight; and the weeks passed monotonously.

And then late in November he received a letter from the senior senator saying that one of the alternates had dropped out, and that the

place would be filled by means of a competitive examination to be held at the end of two weeks.

Rodney took the examination, along with three other boys. It was conducted in the senator's office on State Street, and the young secretary who had grinned at him, on the day the button had come off his coat, presided over the group. Rodney had studied faithfully, working doubly hard during the past two weeks, even though the prize was a doubtful one and might, in the end, result in nothing. The examination was easy for him; he was sure he passed it. But it was not merely a matter of passing; unless he had passed with a better grade than those of the other boys, he could not secure the place.

A fortnight of uncertainty followed; and then at last he received word that his paper had been graded above the three others. He smiled as he read the notification, feeling that he had achieved something. And then the smile faded as he realized how very far he still was from his goal. He might take the examinations for Annapolis only as an alternate. If he should

pass and some one else should fail, he could enter the Naval Academy. There was no other way; his good fortune would depend entirely on the ill fortune of some other fellow. It was not a pleasant thought. Remembering how hard he had worked, how eager he was to end the suspense, he could not bring himself to the point of hoping that one of the other candidates would fail — some one perhaps who had worked as hard as he had and who was as eager as he to enter the Academy.

"I can just go along," he said to himself. "Take the exams and do my best. If somebody flunks and I pass —" He smiled rather ruefully as he remembered the remark that Ted had made, "Like waiting for the boss to die, so you can step into his shoes."

Yes, it was just that! Nevertheless he began to apply himself more diligently than ever to his studies.

Early in April, Rodney spoke to Mr. Dobson about his examinations, which would occupy three full days beginning with the third Wednesday of the month.

"Take the time off," the bookseller said promptly. "You 've earned it — and more. I wish you all success — only," he added with a smile, "I shan't feel badly on my own account if you don't get the appointment. I 'll be very sorry to have you go."

"I 'll have to go sometime, whether I get the appointment or not," replied Rodney.

"Yes, I suppose so. I 've no right to try to keep you if you see something better."

The morning of Rodney's first examination — in United States history — dawned rainy and cold, with a bleak northeast wind sweeping over the city. He made his way to the Custom House, in which the tests were to be held, found the proper room, on the fifteenth floor of the high, needle-like building, and entered with a feeling of nervous timidity. Other boys were seated here and there at desks, some of them frowning anxiously over scraps of paper, others gazing about with an air of nonchalance that seemed too pronounced to be genuine. He sat down at one of the desks, closed his eyes, and thought of the history outline that he had made

two evenings before. Dates seemed to race about in his mind as if in an effort to bring chaos out of the order to which he had reduced them. A feeling akin to panic threatened him, but he fought it off, forced himself somehow to remain calm. He had studied faithfully; it would be silly to get stewed up at the last minute. Other boys entered the room and sat down, some of them glancing nervously at the examiner standing beside one of the windows.

At half past nine the examiner handed out the declaration sheets, announcing that the candidates would have thirty minutes in which to fill in the answers to the various questions — name, date of birth, age, and so forth. The sheets were collected; and at ten o'clock the boys received their examination papers.

Rodney read his paper through and found it easier than he had expected. He set to work on it, and for the next two hours he was hardly aware that there was any one else in the room. At the end of the period he handed it in, confident that he had done well on it.

"A snap!" he heard one of the boys remark.

"Yeh, I killed it!" replied another.

In the afternoon the examination was in physics; it seemed to Rodney a harder paper than the other, but again at the end of the period he felt sure that he had passed.

The next day was devoted to algebra in the morning and ancient history in the afternoon. Rodney was a little less certain about his success with those subjects; but in the evening, after checking up some of the doubtful answers, he concluded that he had managed to pass.

Plane geometry came on the morning of the last day — a long, three-hour examination. Rodney's heart sank as he read the paper through. It seemed to him at first that at least half the questions he could not possibly answer. For three quarters of an hour he struggled with the second part of the first question: "Prove that the diagonals of a rhombus are perpendicular to each other." Perspiration gathered on his forehead, and he cast frequent anxious glances at his watch lying on the desk, observing with growing alarm how the big hand was creeping farther and farther round. He moistened his

lips and gazed about him; everybody else in the room was working. The thought of Ted Morris leaped into his mind. It was mathematics that had beaten Ted, made him walk out in the midst of the examination! Rodney felt a sudden wild impulse to do as Ted had done. He shifted his feet under him and glanced toward the door. Some one at the back of the room murmured, "Gosh!" in a throaty voice. Rodney hesitated, then relaxed, and closed his eyes. A stiff exam, a brutal exam! Others doubtless were finding it stiff and brutal also — but no one had walked out. He would n't be the first to quit! Then he thought of his brother Scouts and of their eager, friendly interest in him, their "Troop pride" in him. No, he would not quit! He would do his best, fight to the last minute!

With set lips he bent over his paper again. He left the first question and went on with the next one. It was easier; he answered it and went on with the one that followed. By that time he had lost his feeling of panic. One after another he answered the questions as best he

could, finding many of them easier than they had seemed at first. With ten minutes to spare at the end, he returned to the question that had baffled him. Some of the later problems that he had solved proved helpful, and with a grin of triumph he finished with the question half a minute before the close of the examination.

He went out to lunch with a fellow named Davis, who had sat beside him. "What 'd you think of it?" Rodney asked him.

"Pretty tough, but I guess I passed," was the reply. "How about you?"

"I don't know," said Rodney. "Say, how did you prove the diagonals of a rhombus are perpendicular to each other? I had an awful time with that one!"

"Like this," observed Davis, and drawing a letter from his pocket, he worked out the problem on the back of it.

"Then I got it right!" cried Rodney in a tone of triumph.

"Well, here 's hoping we make the grade," said Davis.

"I 'm just an alternate," Rodney replied.

Davis grinned. "Cheer up. Somebody may miss out, and then you 'll have his place — only I hope it won't be mine!" he added grimly.

The examination for the afternoon was in English composition and literature, the last of the set. It gave Rodney no particular trouble; and he concluded, from the remarks the other fellows made, that it was easier than they had thought it would be.

The days that followed were filled with keen suspense. Had he passed the tests? Had some one else failed? Over and over Rodney asked himself those questions. And then one day — on his eighteenth birthday, ironically enough — he received the report. He had passed. He not only had passed, he had received a higher rating than any one else who had taken the examinations with him! But no one had failed, and therefore he was not eligible for an appointment.

Rodney flung himself upon his bed and lay there with gaze fixed on the ceiling. The room seemed hot, oppressive, almost stifling. His head ached, and there was a burning sensation in his

eyes. Never since the death of his mother had the world looked so black to him. A wave of bitterness, of self-pity, surged up within him, and he was too weak to fight it down. What was the use? What was the use of anything? For two and a half years he had worked and studied and denied himself in the hope of entering the Naval Academy. He had taken the examinations and passed with a higher mark than any one else, and still he was not able to enter! The thought of waiting another year caused him to clench his teeth angrily. Another year of work, of marking time — and even then he might not get the appointment. Something might happen — something no one could foresee. What was the use anyhow?

His thoughts turned to Mr. Devereux and the chance to make a good start in business. Why bother with the Navy? Why not go to Mr. Devereux and ask for the job? "You will regret it," a voice seemed to say; but Rodney gave no heed to it. Ted Morris had the right idea! He knew what was best for him. "Ted Morris quit," the same voice seemed to say.

"If you give up now, you 're a quitter, too — a poor Scout!"

The thought caused Rodney a swift stab of shame, but he put it aside. No one could say he quit! No one could say he had n't done his best! Luck was against him, that was all. His temples were throbbing now, but his thoughts continued to race on. He knew just what he would do. The next day he would write a letter to Mr. Devereux — or perhaps it would be better to go and have a talk with him. He was not sure which would be better. But one thing was sure: he would not let the chance go by. A fair start with a company like Mr. Devereux's was the next best thing to Annapolis — yes, probably in the long run it would prove even better. Well, it was settled anyway — settled at last — and that was a relief!

He sighed heavily and stared out the window. It was growing dark, and lights were appearing in some of the houses in the next street. His uncle ought to come home presently. Rodney wondered what the old man would say when he told him of his failure and of his decision to go

into business. His uncle would be disappointed — yes, very much disappointed. Well, it could not be helped. He had made his decision, and he was satisfied with it.

CHAPTER IX

THE FALCON OF LIVERPOOL

More and more lights began to gleam in the houses on the next street. Rodney lay on the bed, still staring out the window. His head ached less acutely now, but his mind was ill at ease. It seemed to him odd that, having made his decision, he should feel no relief, that he should still be hearing that same voice: "You will regret it. Ted Morris quit. If you give up now, you 're a quitter, too — a poor Scout!" In vain he tried to ignore it. The voice — it seemed almost like a real voice at times — continued: "You will disappoint every one who knows you. And what of your mother, Rodney?

What of her and her confidence in you? In the end you will hate yourself for yielding. You once won a basketball game just because you would not be beaten. Have you forgotten that?"

Rodney pushed himself upward on the bed. No, he had not forgotten. "Victory equals will" — Foch's formula — he had not forgotten that either. It turned his thoughts back to Mr. Fisher and Frank O'Connor and the others. What would they think of a fellow — especially of him! — if he quit while there was still a chance? Rodney knew only too well what they would think and how they would feel. And the Scouts in Mr. Holman's Troop — what of them? It was the thought of them that had made him struggle to success through that brutal math paper. How would they feel if he should suddenly throw his whole ambition to one side, acknowledging thereby that their pride and confidence in him had been ill-founded? He might explain and make excuses, but he knew that all his excuses would not satisfy them. He was sure of it because he knew that no excuses he might make would really satisfy himself.

"A Scout is brave . . . defeat does not down him." Again it was the voice of his conscience that spoke — and this time it was not to be denied, not to be thrust aside even for a moment.

"I 've got to go on!" he murmured wearily. "I 've got to live with myself — and I could n't if I quit! I 've got to go on. I will go on!"

Only then did he find real relief.

The stairs in the hallway creaked, and presently he heard the outer door open. "You home, Rodney?" came the soft voice of his uncle.

"Yes, Uncle Jonathan, I 'm in here."

"Don't you feel quite well, Rodney?"

"Oh, just had sort of a headache. I 'm all right now, though." Rodney rose and entered the living room.

Uncle Jonathan lit the lamp on the table. Then he entered his bedroom, returning presently with an envelope in his hand. He held it out to his nephew, saying, "I — I was to give you this to-day — it being your eighteenth birthday."

There seemed to Rodney something strange in

the way his uncle spoke, and he observed that the old man's hand was trembling. He took the envelope and gave a little start as he observed the handwriting — "For Rodney on his eighteenth birthday."

"It 's — it 's from your mother," said Uncle Jonathan. "She wanted me to hold it — until to-day." Then he entered the bedroom again, closing the door behind him.

Rodney seated himself in the big chair beside the lamp, moved by a sense of awe and wonder. Another letter from his mother! Tears filled his eyes as he recalled the closing words of her first letter: "Think of me always as somewhere above, watching over you." Watching over him! Oh, how true that was! Very carefully he broke the seal and drew her letter forth; and with eyes still wet and misty he read:

"My dearest Rodney:

"Almost three years have passed, and it is now your eighteenth birthday. My boy is on the verge of manhood! What has happened during those three years? Oh, if I

could only know! If I could only be sure that life has been kind to my poor motherless boy! I know you will forgive the questions I am going to ask. I must ask them, loving you as I do — oh, so much, so very much! Have you kept the faith, Rodney? Have you been 'a good Scout'? Have you followed the course that we charted together so often? Have you been true to the Three Points of Honor? Oh, I am sure you have! Only a loving, anxious mother like me would ask! I am smiling, Rodney, as I say to you what I have said on your other birthdays — many happy returns!

Your ever loving,
Mother."

The tears ran unheeded down Rodney's cheeks as he pressed the letter to his lips, but they were wholesome, natural tears of emotion quite without bitterness or remorse. How thankful he was that he had made his decision before he received that letter! How supremely thankful that he had resolved to go on, to keep the faith!

But the Three Points of Honor — had he been true to them? Very softly he repeated the Scout Oath: "On my honor I will do my best: To do my duty to God and my Country, and to obey the Scout Law; To help other people at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight." Then one by one he pondered the twelve items of the Scout Law: "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent." And in the end he was able to say, knowing that he spoke the truth, "I have done my best!"

Yes, he had done his best — and was still doing his best — to live according to Scout standards; and those standards were no more, no less, than the best advice that a wise and loving mother could offer — a code of clean and courageous living that any one, young or old, might follow to advantage — a clear-cut, practical code for everyday use.

The memory of his mother's letter was with him constantly during the next few days. It helped him to face the future with new courage,

helped him to smile as he talked with Mr. Holman and to his brother Scouts of his failure to secure the appointment and of his determination to try again. He decided to get in touch with his senior senator once more, and also with the other senator and with his congressman.

One evening he wrote a letter to each and sent them off. Then he penned a note to Ted, telling him of his disappointment and of his determination to try again. And two or three days later he went to Gloucester for the week-end. He went less with the idea of fishing than of merely spending a few pleasant hours in the company of the captain and his wife. More than any one else she filled, in a slight degree, the place of his mother — and at that time, following the receipt of his mother's second letter, he felt very lonely, very much in need of comfort.

Captain Tuckaberry greeted him with a hearty handclasp. "Ye 've got to stay overnight with us, Rodney!" he exclaimed. "An' to-morrer you an' me 'll go out to the banks fer a day o' fishin'. That to yer taste, lad?"

"It surely is, cap'n!"

"That 's good, that 's good!" responded the old fisherman, laughing. "The rest o' the day, now, ye 're Ma Tuckaberry's boy; she 'll take care o' ye an' mebbe bake ye a green-apple pie. But to-morrer ye 're my boy!"

It was a quiet evening that the three of them spent round the little oil lamp after supper. While Ma Tuckaberry sat tranquilly knitting, Rodney listened in fascination to the yarns that the old fisherman spun for his benefit — thrilling stories of vessels that had gone ashore in storms, of schooners afire at sea, of tremendous catches of fish upon the banks, of adventures in far-off places, and many other episodes with which the captain's mind seemed filled. When at last he climbed the stairs to the small bedroom that the two old people called "Rodney's room", it seemed to him almost as if he himself had participated in some of those stirring scenes.

It was black night when a hand upon his shoulder roused him. "Git up an' git dressed, lad," said the voice of the fisherman. "Ain't

nothin' like an' early start when ye 're goin' fishing."

Rodney shivered as he got into his clothes — a pair of old trousers, a sweater, a pair of black rubber boots that Captain Tuckaberry had ready for him. After a hearty breakfast he donned an oilskin and a sou'wester; and half an hour later he and the captain were in the dory, moving at half speed through the water. The sky was graying now, but the air was heavy with mist.

"Fog again," observed the old man. "Wal, I reckon 't will burn off, mebbe."

When they were well beyond the mouth of the harbor, he turned the wheel over to Rodney. "You know the course, lad," he observed. "Just keep a sharp lookout so 's we won't run anybody down. An' while ye 're sarvin' yer trick, I 'll take a leetle snooze."

The dory rose and fell, riding a wave, dropping into the trough, then rising again. An hour passed, and the sky grew lighter. Rodney sat with shoulders hunched over the wheel, peering ahead. He had never before been out in such

a fog. It drifted in the air currents, forming broad layers and fluttering ribbons. Fine particles of moisture fell like tiny flakes of snow, swirling across the prow of the boat and vanishing in the dark water. It seemed to him there was something mysterious in the way the fog acted, sometimes thinning out for a few seconds, then closing in again more heavily than ever. With the old fisherman dozing in the bow, Rodney had the sensation of being utterly alone upon a strange sea — a sea heavily shrouded in a kind of cold, wet, fluffy gray wool that deadened the monotonous bark of the exhaust and the constant slapping of the waves against the sides of the dory. It was as if he were somehow shut off forever from the ordinary world, as if he must go on and on in the fog until the end of time.

Another hour passed, and the fog gave no signs of lifting. Captain Tuckaberry roused and blinked his eyes; he passed a hand across his moist face, observing, "Fog 's still with us. Wal, it can't last ferever, that 's sure an' sartin. I never yet see a fog that did n't burn off or

git blowed off. What 's wrong?" he asked abruptly.

Rodney's chin was lifted, and he was sniffing the air.

"What 's wrong?" repeated the captain.

"I smell something," was the reply.

"Ye smell sunthin', eh? Wal, now, I smell the exhaust —"

"It 's different from that," replied Rodney, still sniffing. "It 's like smoke — wood smoke. Don't you smell it, cap'n?"

The old man frowned and wrinkled his nose. "Hm, mebbe," he observed doubtfully. Then after a pause, "Yes, it do smell like wood a-burnin' some'res, an' tar along with it."

The odor became sharper. It seemed to Rodney strange that there should be wood smoke in the air; it was not a natural odor out there so far from land. He asked the captain if he thought it might come from some craft passing to windward.

"Some steamer burnin' wood 'stead o' coal?" the fisherman inquired. "Wal, now —"

A hollow boom like a single clap of thunder

shook the air. The dory, riding the crest of a wave, seemed to quiver all over, hesitating an instant before dropping into the trough.

"What was that?" gasped Rodney.

Captain Tuckaberry was on his knees now, peering over the bow. "An explosion, that 's what that was! Some vessel out there — an' not so fur out, neither! Give her a leetle turn to port, lad, just a leetle turn."

Rodney swung the wheel, and the prow of the dory dug into a wave and came up dripping.

The fisherman crept back close to the engine. "A vessel out there, an' she 's afire sure 's my name 's Nate Tuckaberry! I reckon 'twas a boiler we heard go up — an' mebbe there 's another to follow it —"

With lips parted and trembling, Rodney continued to peer into the mist. The odor of wood smoke was heavier, more pungent; he even fancied he could see the smoke drifting with the fine particles of moisture. He glanced apprehensively at his companion. The captain's brows were contracted as he strained to pierce the fog.

"Cap'n, if that other boiler explodes —" Rodney's words were barely audible, almost smothered in the noise of the exhaust. He moistened his lips and tightened his grasp on the wheel.

Captain Tuckaberry turned his head slowly. "Lad," he said, "are ye scared to go on?"

"No, cap'n." Rodney spoke the words mechanically.

"Keep her headed, then, as she 's headed now," said the fisherman, and he began to crawl back towards the bow.

Rodney clenched his teeth hard to prevent them from chattering. "If that other boiler should explode —" He choked off the thought and jerked his chin upward. It was no time for such fears! Out there somewhere in the fog a vessel was afire — lives were perhaps in danger — lives that might be saved!

The smoke increased. He could see it plainly now. A few minutes later, above the noise of the exhaust, he heard a faint crackling. Then a puff of wind thinned the fog, and at the same instant a dull orange glow appeared off the star-

board bow — a patch of fire that seemed almost on a level with the water.

"There she is!" cried the captain. "A schooner — auxil'ry engine —"

And before the fog closed in again, Rodney had a glimpse of mast and spars and a dark hull wreathed in smoke, with a broad tongue of flame licking upward amidships. So fleeting was the glimpse that it left him with a queer feeling of unreality.

"Ye see that?" cried Captain Tuckaberry. "A schooner — an' she 's doomed, she is! Gad! I hope all hands got safe away in the boats! I hope that explosion did n't —" His voice trailed off, and he remained staring into space.

A few minutes later another puff of wind partly cleared the fog, and the burning vessel seemed to leap toward them, standing out for an instant clear-cut against the water. With white face straining over the wheel, Rodney saw dark figures moving in jerky impulses on the after part of the deck. He noted the tongue of flame darting through a billowing mass of black smoke. The wind rolled the smoke forward, pushing it

slowly along close to the deck. Then the fog thickened again, and he was aware only of the crackling that he had heard before, louder now like a harsh roar.

"Ye see that?" Captain Tuckaberry cried again. "Make fer the stern, Rodney — to win'ard. There 's men aboard her. Tarnation! What 's happened to the lifeboats?"

Rodney swung the wheel. The dory rose and fell, drawing nearer and nearer. Presently he heard the sound of voices — hoarse shouts mingled with the scraping and banging of wood. Then he caught sight of the schooner again, so close that with a startled cry he cut off the motor. He saw now that she had a sharp list to starboard — so sharp that the men on the deck had to brace their legs in order to stand erect. They shouted and beckoned as the small boat drifted toward the stern. He counted eight of them.

When the dory was half a score of yards from the vessel, one of the men tossed a line. It smacked across the gunwales, and Captain Tuckaberry seized it and made it fast.

"What name?" the fisherman bellowed between his hands.

"The *Falcon*, of Liverpool," came the reply.

"Where 's yer lifeboats?"

"Damaged," replied the same voice. "For God's sake, don't delay! There 's a hundred gallon tank o' gasoline b'low decks!"

Rodney felt his scalp prickle. He was aware of a sudden faintness as the men aboard the *Falcon* hauled at the line. In a few moments the dory was under the broad stern. He stood up and grasped the gunwale, clinging to it with cold fingers. Smoke and fog drifted thick about him. His eyes smarted. His legs wabbled under him.

"Git aboard!" he heard Captain Tuckaberry shout in a high-pitched voice.

Rodney's alarm increased. With the thought of the fire raging amidships, it seemed to him that at any second it must reach the gasoline. As in a nightmare he saw the men of the *Falcon* begin to lower themselves one after another into the dory — lean, smoke-blackened seamen with the look of death in their eyes.

"Make fer the stern, Rodney — to win'ard. There's men aboard her."

"Six o' ye," observed the old fisherman, staring hard at them when they were huddled in the small boat. "Thought there was more. Where's yer cap'n?"

"He's still aboard," a man replied.

"Tarnation!" cried Captain Tuckaberry, pulling at his whiskers. "What in thunder is he doin'?"

At that moment a burly, red-faced man in a blue coat appeared on the deck above. "Is Dick down there? Is my boy there?" he demanded, squinting with bloodshot eyes in the smoke and fog.

The seamen looked questioningly from one to another. "No, cap'n, he ain't here," some one replied.

The man on deck continued to squint downward as if in disbelief. Then suddenly whirling, he darted away from the rail.

The men in the dory stared at one another. "Last I see Dick, he was twixt me an' the cabin," one of them muttered.

The small boat rocked and pitched. The smoke grew thicker, the crackling of the fire

louder. A piece of timber somewhere forward fell with a heavy crash.

"We ought t' get out o' here!" said a voice. "First 't was fire. Then the boiler blowed. Next it 'll be that tank o' gasoline!"

Silence followed the remark. The dory rose and fell, rose and fell, and the seamen continued to stare at one another, now and then casting anxious glances upward toward the overhanging stern.

Rodney mopped the sweat from his forehead. His feeling of faintness had left him, but his whole body was trembling. He could not keep his thoughts from that tank of gasoline. His breathing was quick and labored as he gazed upward toward the deck of the *Falcon*. What was happening up there? Where was the captain's boy? And where was the captain?

The old fisherman suddenly cupped his hands and shouted. Several of the seamen shouted also. There was no response.

"I s'y," cried one of the men angrily, "we 'll all of us get blowed to scraps if we wait much bloomin' longer!"

With an impulsive movement Rodney stretched out his hand and seized the dangling rope.

"What ye about?" demanded Captain Tuckaberry.

"I 'll see what 's happened to them," was the reply, and with a jump Rodney started up the rope.

The fisherman shouted something after him, but Rodney did not catch the words. Panting, he grasped the rail and drew his body over it to the deck. A slow-moving wave of warm smoke poured into his face. He closed his eyes and waited on hands and knees until the air felt cooler, clearer.

When he opened his eyes again, the tears streamed down his face. He peered forward, blinking rapidly. At first all he could see was smoke, choking, biting, stinging black smoke that hid everything. He rose to his feet on the sloping deck and took several cautious steps, going to his knees again when he stumbled over a heavy object — part of a crude life raft that the crew had been building when the dory arrived.

The smoke cleared a little, and he had a glimpse of the cabin; flames were playing about one side of it, and smoke was pouring out of the open door.

He rose and started forward again, almost falling a second time as the deck gave a sudden lurch under his feet. With legs braced, he paused and peered about him. He tried to shout, but his effort ended in a choking cough. He could still see the cabin, very dimly now, and he made his way toward it. The breeze was at his back, but it was not strong enough to sweep away the smoke; and as he advanced he was aware of successive waves of heat that reached him whenever the breeze slackened.

He was perhaps a dozen yards from the cabin and on the point of turning back, when he saw a bulky figure lurch out of the doorway, stagger to one side, and collapse on the deck. Rodney ran to him, fighting the smoke. He seized the man by the shoulders and dragged him toward the stern.

A stronger puff of wind cleared the smoke temporarily from the after part of the vessel.

The man opened his eyes. He struggled to his knees, coughing and gasping. "Dick — he 's in there — in the cabin —" He suddenly choked and slumped forward, clawing at his throat; but he roused again in a few seconds. "Dick — he went to fetch —"

The deck lurched again, and Rodney staggered several feet from the prostrate seaman; but the voice followed him: "Dick — my boy — he 's in the cabin —"

There was something heart-rending in the choking utterance. Rodney clenched his fists. His lips formed half a dozen incoherent, encouraging words. Then with arms raised before his face, he started for the cabin again.

A few feet from the doorway he hesitated, urged by a strong impulse to turn back. Then swift came the thought of the *Falcon's* captain again, of the anguish and appeal in his voice. Rodney jerked his sou'wester farther down over his eyes and, lowering his head, plunged into the smoke that poured from the doorway.

A blanket of heat seemed to close round him. He held his breath and groped about, reaching

forth this way and that. Something seared his hand. The shock made him take a breath, and he staggered to one side, overturning a chair, and went to his knees, gasping, half-choking. He began to crawl forward, fighting down a desire to open his mouth. A roar of sound filled his ears, and little white lights seemed to dance before his tight-shut eyes. At last he took another breath; the air was clearer at the bottom of the room, but there was smoke in it — hot smoke that stung his throat. He continued to crawl forward, reaching, groping, pushing at objects in his way. His temples were throbbing now as if the arteries would burst, and it was as if a great weight were pressing against his chest, forcing him to exert all his strength to crawl a few inches. Voices seemed to be ringing in his ears — strange confused voices that came from a vast distance.

Suddenly his stretching fingers fumbled against something soft. They closed on it, moved along it until one hand touched a shoe. In spite of the pain in his throat and chest, he

felt a vague sense of satisfaction, of triumph. He had found Dick! Clutching the boy's ankle, he half-rose and began to back toward the door, dragging the inert body. But once more he had to breathe that hot, smoke-laden air. It made his head reel, and he went to his knees again, feeling as if he were about to faint. He shook his head from side to side in an effort to clear it. He opened his eyes, but had to close them at once. The roar was louder in his ears now — a roar like that of the sea in a storm — and still the voices seemed to be calling from a vast distance.

He began again to drag the boy backward — a jerk, a pause, then another jerk. He wondered if there were any life left in the body. He wondered if he were moving in the right direction. The thought that he might not be able to find the doorway sent him into a momentary panic. But he forced the fear from his mind. A jerk, a pause, then another jerk. The slope of the floor made him suddenly realize that the doorway must be behind him, and the thought heartened him. Gasping and choking, he in-

creased his efforts. A jerk, a pause, then another jerk — it seemed that he must go on in that way until his strength failed and he pitched forward, inert, upon the body that he was dragging. Each time he jerked at it he felt that it became heavier, harder to move. Yes, his strength was failing —

A rush of cool air struck his back, and the voices that he had been hearing grew suddenly louder. He opened his eyes in gray smoke. Hands closed on his arms, and he heard Captain Tuckaberry shout, "Let go his leg, lad!"

Rodney's fingers loosened on the boy's ankle, and he allowed himself to be dragged backward and to one side. In the comparatively clear air of the deck he breathed deeply as if he never could get enough of it.

"Can ye stand up?" said the voice of a seaman.

Rodney nodded his head, feeling that to try to speak would be torture to his burning throat. He pushed himself slowly to his feet, spreading them wide apart on the sloping deck. He took a few steps away from the cabin, vaguely aware

of dark forms bending over another there where the smoke was thickest.

Suddenly the deck seemed to sink under him, sending him reeling to one side. He reached out blindly, seeking for something to grasp. He was vaguely aware of the old fisherman's voice shouting his name, of the hissing sound of water on burning timbers following the fresh list of the vessel; then his knees struck sharply against something hard, his body shot forward into a mass of smoke, and he had a bewildering sense of falling — falling as from a great height. He threw his arms protectingly in front of his face, and the next instant he struck with a splash.

Water, cold salt water, enveloped him. He felt himself going down, down into increasing coldness. He struggled, kicked, worked his arms, fought against taking a breath as he had fought in the smoke-filled cabin. He opened his eyes and saw little white bubbles in the green water. Then his head rose above the surface, and he caught his breath. He had lost his sou'wester in the plunge, and the breeze was cool against his hair. Something seemed to

drag him under again, and he realized that he could not keep afloat for long with his heavy boots on. Doubling up in the water, he succeeded in loosening the straps above his knees. Then he kicked until first one boot, then the other came off. A few moments later his head rose above the surface again.

Rodney was not frightened. His first sensation was one of relief. His head was clear, and he could breathe air that was entirely free from smoke. Then he was aware of a feeling of pain in his left hand. Treading water, he held it up and saw that the palm was red and blistered. He heard shouts somewhere in the fog; they were like the voices he had heard in the cabin — confused and far off. He tried to answer, but his voice came only as a harsh whisper. Over his shoulder he could see a circular patch of orange burning through the mist; it seemed to be growing swiftly fainter. He started to swim toward it, but his left hand pained him so acutely when he pressed it against the water that he could not use it. He turned over on his back and began to kick, using his right hand as best

he could. After perhaps a minute he paused to look. To his dismay he saw nothing of the orange patch that marked the burning schooner. Then something like terror seized him, and he tried again to shout. It was of no use. His voice was gone, and his effort caused him a spasm of coughing that tore at the lining of his throat.

An object bumped against his shoulder, and his hand closed upon it instinctively. It was a piece of wreckage, perhaps a part of one of the *Falcon's* lifeboats. He got his arm across it and tried to lift the upper half of his body upon it, but it submerged under his weight. He remained then with his arm across it, his fingers clutching a spike that protruded. There was nothing he could do except hold on and drift with the currents that were carrying him farther and farther from the schooner. The piece of wreckage rose and fell with the waves. Their crests hissed and slapped at him, now and then filling his nose and mouth with water. It smarted and stung — smarted his throat and his eyes, stung his injured hand.

The voices that he had heard were silent now;

the only sounds were the hissing and slapping of the waves. The thought of the gasoline that the schooner carried flashed into his mind, and he wondered why it had not exploded. It seemed to him that hours had passed since he had climbed over the *Falcon's* stern.

A sudden hollow popping interrupted his thoughts, and he recognized the rhythmical bark of the dory's motor. It seemed far, far off, but it gave him hope. Captain Tuckaberry would scour the sea in search of him; it was perhaps only a matter of time before the dory would pick him up.

The popping of the motor grew louder; then after a while it began to die away. At last it was silent; but a few minutes later he heard it again. He listened while it drew nearer and nearer; then it began to grow fainter again, until finally it died away a second time. Not long after it had ceased, a dull rumble shook the air, and he was aware of a slight tremor of the water against his body. He guessed what had happened: the flames had reached the tank of gasoline at last. With the thought came a

feeling of thanksgiving. At least they were safe, those others!

Clinging with cold fingers to the spike, Rodney listened anxiously, hoping to hear the dory again. But the minutes passed — a quarter of an hour, half an hour — and the only sound was the hiss and ripple of the wave crests. The fog drifted about him, raining its particles obliquely downward, forming in fantastic layers, thinning out for a few seconds, then closing in again.

At last he gave up all hope of being picked up by the dory. His thoughts thereafter were mostly for himself. He was cold; and as time passed, the chill of the water seemed to deaden the pain in his hand and the ache in his throat. He wondered how long a person could remain in water as cold as that — icy water that came down from the north. He wondered whether he would feel better if he could struggle out of his oilskin, but finally decided against it, reasoning that the garment helped him a little to keep afloat.

The cold became more acute, setting his teeth to chattering. There was no way of combating

it except by the sheer force of his will. He tried to convince himself that he would soon become used to it. He had often been as cold as that before. He could stand it — yes, he could stand it for many hours if necessary. Still his teeth continued to chatter, and his back felt as if it were encased in ice. He tried to force the thought of cold completely from his mind. He studied the fog in hopes that it might be lifting. He said to himself that the sky was a little brighter, and that the wind in his face was a trifle stronger — but he was not quite sure. He wondered what time it was and how long he had been in the water. He had the feeling that he had been drifting for hours and hours. Surely the fog would begin to lift soon; then some passing craft would see him and pick him up.

Again he was painfully aware how cold he was. His mind turned to his uncle and the warm little rooms on Pinckney Street. The thought was vaguely comforting, and he dwelt on it for a long while in anticipation. A gull screamed in the grayness overhead. Startled, he lifted his eyes and had a glimpse of outspread

wings; then the gull vanished, its screams becoming fainter and fainter. Rodney realized then that he was hungry, and he thought of Ma Tuckaberry and of the green-apple pie she had promised to bake for him. Where was the captain? Had he given up the search, thinking him drowned? It seemed so. And Dick, the boy he had dragged from the cabin — was he alive? Had he been alive when he dragged him forth? Rodney pondered the questions in an effort to keep from thinking of the cold that tortured him.

The fog continued to shower its particles down upon the water; but the wind was stronger now — yes, he was sure of it! And it was blowing, not in his face as before, but against his right cheek. He wondered whether the wind really had changed, or whether the currents were carrying him in a different direction. The waves continued to slap and hiss and ripple. There was a kind of rhythm in the sound they made — a pleasant, soothing sound.

Hours seemed to pass with no visible change in the enveloping fog. Rodney's arm, resting

on the piece of wreckage, was beginning to feel numb. He shifted his position so that his other arm was on the wood, but he could not grasp the spike with his injured hand; and after a few moments he changed back again. The numbness in his right arm seemed to be creeping toward the shoulder. His feet, too, felt numb; and before long he had the feeling that the numbness was creeping up toward his waist. The thought frightened him. It seemed a horrible way for a person to die — to feel all the warmth of his body being slowly drawn out of him!

Rodney closed his eyes, and suddenly it was as if his mother were before him, very close to him. She was smiling as he had last seen her smile on that morning so long ago when she had left for Hartsdale. It seemed for a moment as if she were about to beckon to him, to speak his name, calling him to her; but she made no movement, uttered no word, only smiled at him in the old way.

He opened his eyes at last, feeling somehow comforted, stronger. He tried not to think of

the numbness in his limbs or of the painful, icy chill in his back. With an effort he set his chattering teeth. He must not quit! He must maintain his courage, his will to win, to live! "Victory equals will!" He repeated the phrase to himself, repeated it again and again until the words grew meaningless and an overpowering desire to sleep came upon him. He closed his eyes, opened them, closed them again. It was pleasant to float with eyes closed. Nothing else had seemed so pleasant since his plunge into the water.

A wave spilled its crest in his face. He opened his eyes suddenly, spitting out the water that had got into his mouth. There were no longer any fog particles in the air; but he felt no surprise, no elation. He only gazed languidly about — at a fog bank low upon the water far off, at a patch of blue sky to his right. He was not cold now, only drowsy, comfortably drowsy. He noted his white fingers fastened round the spike — noted them with a kind of objective interest as if they were not a part of him. Then his eyes closed again. It was so pleasant to

float that way! He had the strange feeling that he was in a dream that had lasted for many hours — a dream from which he had no desire to awake.

CHAPTER X

A PILE OF LETTERS

The U. S. destroyer *Dinsmore*, Commander James Redfield, was making twenty-four knots off Cape Ann, on her way to the New York Navy Yard, tossing up twin plumes of spray that gleamed snow-white against her gray bows in the late-afternoon sunlight.

Surgeon K. Wilson Smith, a well-knit, strong-featured man with iron-gray hair and dark moustache, lay upon his bunk, reading the newspaper. He lowered it abruptly and grasped the edge of the bed as the vessel rolled under him and then began to pitch violently. "What's up?" he thought. "We're taking our own wash."

The destroyer continued to pitch and roll for a while, gradually finding a more even keel. The doctor returned to his newspaper; but again he lowered it abruptly as he heard the bell signal "stop" and then "reverse."

A few minutes later an orderly entered and announced that the doctor was wanted above at once.

Emerging from the hatchway, Surgeon Smith saw Commander Redfield and a group of sailors bending over a prostrate, dripping figure in oil-skins. In a moment the doctor was on his knees beside the figure. He loosened the clothing at the throat, touched the eyes with his fingers, pressed his ear against the motionless chest.

"Poor lad!" murmured the captain. "I 'm afraid we fished him out too late."

The sailors stood silent, staring downward at the pale, salt-encrusted face, the dark brown hair plastered against the broad forehead.

The doctor rose to his feet. "Get him inside," he ordered crisply. And as the sailors lifted the

figure between them, he turned to the captain, adding, "There 's life in him, sir."

"Carry him into my stateroom," said the captain.

Half an hour later Commander Redfield and the doctor sat beside the spare berth in the captain's room, watching the slight rise and fall of the sheet that covered the young man's chest.

"He 's breathing better," observed the doctor.

The captain nodded. "A fine-looking lad. I wonder how he got into the water? Been in a long time, that 's evident. The men had to pry his fingers loose from the spike he was holding on to!"

A bandaged hand stirred on the sheet, and the head shifted a trifle on the pillow. The eyelids fluttered, then opened, revealing blue eyes that seemed fixed on distant space.

The doctor laid his palm gently against the warm forehead. "You 're feeling better, are n't you?"

The eyes of the patient seemed to grope, finally meeting those of the doctor. "Where am I?" The lips formed the words soundlessly.

"You are safe on board the U. S. destroyer *Dinsmore*," replied Surgeon Smith. "What is your name?"

"Rodney Owen." This time the faintest of whispers came from the lips.

"What happened to you?"

There was a pause; then, "I fell overboard." A sigh of utter weariness followed the barely audible remark. The eyes closed again, the head rolled back on the pillow, and he lay motionless save for the slight movement of his breathing.

"Poor lad," murmured the captain again. "He 's had a hard time of it."

It was early morning when the *Dinsmore* docked at the Navy Yard, in Brooklyn. Throughout the night Rodney had slept without once awaking — the deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion. Towards mid-morning he roused and asked for water. The attendant in the room brought it to him, and he drank a little and then fell asleep again.

Shortly before noon Surgeon Smith, who had been ashore, encountered Commander Redfield

on the forward deck. The doctor had a copy of the *Boston Post* in his hand, and his usually quiet eyes were alive with animation. "Here 's something interesting, sir!" he said, passing him the newspaper. "All about the boy we picked up. I had an idea there might be something in a Boston paper. By Jove, it 's a thing to stir your blood!"

Commander Redfield spread the paper out. The leading story was a dispatch from Gloucester of the day before, surmounted by a four-column headline: "Schooner's Crew Saved as Boy Rescuer Loses Life." The account began:

"The tramp schooner *Falcon* of Liverpool, Captain Edgar Gray, bound from Rio de Janeiro to Saint John with a cargo of coffee, took fire early this morning from some unknown cause and, following two explosions from an auxiliary boiler and a gasoline tank, went down off Gloucester in a heavy fog. The *Falcon* carried no wireless. The crew of eight men were rescued by two fishermen in a motor-driven dory, on their way to the

banks, one of the fishermen, Rodney Owen of Boston, a boy of eighteen, being drowned after he had dragged the captain's son from the vessel's burning cabin.

"Captain Nathan Tuckaberry of this city, an old man, owner of the dory, broke down and sobbed like a child when he told how young Owen lost his life. It seems he and Owen had all but two of the crew in the dory, which had sped to the *Falcon* soon after her boiler blew up. They waited for Captain Gray, who would n't come until he had found his sixteen-year-old son, all the while there being grave danger that a gasoline tank aboard the *Falcon* would explode.

"Young Owen went aboard at last to search for them. As he did not return, the old fisherman and two of the crew went after him. They found the *Falcon's* captain flat on his face on the deck, gasping in the smoke and clutching at his throat. He was just able to point towards the cabin and gasp that they were both in there. 'We ran to the cabin,' said the fisherman, 'but none of us was daring

enough to go in at first, the heat and smoke was so bad. Then whilst we sort o' waited, Owen came out on his hands and knees, dragging the captain's boy.'

"A few seconds later the schooner gave a sharp list, and Owen, weak and dizzy and half-blinded, pitched over the rail into the water. Once in the dory again, with all the crew safe, Tuckaberry said he cruised about in hopes of picking up Owen, but the fog was so heavy he had to give it up at last, sure that the boy had drowned. 'Like a son, that 's how I loved that boy!' the old man said tearfully. 'He was hoping to enter Annapolis some day, and me and my wife was proud and full of hope for him.'"

The account ended with details of the fire aboard the schooner, told in the words of Captain Gray. His son, it appeared, had returned to the cabin to secure some personal belongings — an act that had nearly cost him his life.

"By George!" exclaimed Commander Redfield, lowering the paper. "That does stir the

blood, doctor! You 're right, it does! A plucky lad, a plucky lad!"

"Yes, and a lad with an iron constitution!" added the doctor. "And an iron will along with it! That 's what stirs me even more than the rescue. Do you realize he must have been in the water at least half a dozen hours before we picked him up?"

The captain nodded. "I told you how the men had to pry his fingers loose from round that spike. By George, and he wants to go to Annapolis! Well, that 's the sort we need in the Navy!" He put his hand on the doctor's shoulder. "It 's up to you to pull him through. He deserves to live, if anybody does. I 'm going ashore directly, and I 'll give out the news. I fancy it will make that old Gloucesterman happy!"

Towards the middle of the afternoon Rodney awoke with the feeling that he had just fallen from a great height into a burning liquid. His whole body seemed to be on fire, and it was as if a film covered his eyes. Through it he observed the low ceiling of the room, the painted

white walls and the dark folds of a blanket at the foot of his bed; but everything was distorted, grotesque. Some one whose face he could not see held a glass to his lips, and he swallowed the contents without tasting them. A voice was speaking — a low, quiet voice repeating something over and over. It grew fainter and fainter, then ceased. Again Rodney slept.

During the next two days he was delirious, burning with fever, rousing now and then without knowing it, tossing about and uttering incoherent words and phrases. Surgeon Smith and a surgeon from the Naval Hospital attended him constantly, one or the other being always at the bedside. On the morning of the third day the fever broke, covering his body with cold sweat; and that afternoon Rodney was transported to the Green Point Hospital.

He awakened the next day, clear-headed but with a sense of utter weariness. A nurse was seated beside the bed, and after noting the high ceiling and the open spaces on both sides of him, Rodney looked at her inquiringly.

"You are in the Green Point Hospital," she said, smiling.

"Why — am I — here?" Rodney was surprised that his voice should be so feeble.

"You have been ill, but you are better now. You are going to get well."

"Oh," said Rodney. Then he observed his bandaged hand lying upon the coverlet, and with a rush of memory everything came back to him — the burning schooner, the hot, smoke-filled cabin, his plunge into the water, his feeling of icy cold, then a quiet voice telling him he was safe aboard the destroyer.

"And the others?" he asked suddenly. "Did they reach land all right?"

"Yes, all of them are safe, including the boy you dragged from the cabin."

Rodney's lips curved in a faint smile. He sighed wearily and closed his eyes; but presently he opened them again. They wore a startled look as his gaze fixed itself on the face of the nurse. "Has anybody told my uncle about me? He — he ought to know —"

The nurse rose and turned to Commander Red-

field, who had been standing a little way back from the head of the bed. "I think it will be all right for you to talk to him," she said.

The officer came forward and sat down in the chair. He put his hand gently on Rodney's shoulder, saying, "I am Commander Redfield of the destroyer *Dinsmore*, which picked you up. I have looked after your affairs as best I could. There were telegrams of inquiry following the news in the press that you were safe here in New York. One was from your uncle, Mr. Jonathan Eldred. I replied to it at once, setting his fears at rest. I told him you would soon be with him once more."

"Oh, thank you!" murmured Rodney.

"There were three others," continued the captain, "one from a Mr. Holman of Boston, one from Holbrook Devereux, and another from a man named Fisher in Ohio. I took care of all of them. I also wired to Gloucester, to the old fisherman. Your friends know that you are alive and doing nicely. There is nothing for you to worry about, my boy. You will have the best

of care here until you are strong enough to travel. Then you can go home."

"Oh, thank you!" Rodney murmured again. A tinge of color came into his cheeks as he observed with sudden interest the neat uniform of the man seated beside him.

The captain noted his look of interest. "So you were planning to enter the Naval Academy?" he said with a smile.

"Yes — if I can get the appointment — next year, I hope. I passed the examinations as an alternate —"

"Yes, there was a piece in the paper about that. Your training as a Scout, I fancy, has helped you a lot towards your goal — helped you also perhaps to hold on to that spike even after you had lost consciousness."

Rodney looked puzzled.

The captain went on: "I believe one of the Scout rules is this: 'On my honor I will do my best to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.' That 's so, is n't it?"

"Yes," said Rodney. How strange it seemed

to him to hear the naval officer quote the Third Point of Honor!

"Well," the captain continued crisply, "I 'd certainly say you had lived up to it! Your recent experience proves it. No weakling could have come through as you did! You see," he observed with a friendly smile, "I know quite a bit about you. Every one does who reads the newspapers. Later on, when you are stronger, I 'll bring you some clippings, and you can read the whole account of your adventures."

He rose, adding, "If there is anything you want, anything I can do, please tell me."

The next day Rodney was permitted to sit up in bed for a while; and shortly after dinner the nurse brought him a packet of papers, which she said Commander Redfield had sent. They were the newspaper clippings, and Rodney read them with mingled emotions. A flush of embarrassment came over his face as he noted the frank words of praise for him, uttered by the old fisherman and the *Falcon's* captain and Mr. Holman and others whom the reporters had interviewed; yet he could not help being thrilled by

some of the statements and by the pictures of himself, one of them showing him in the uniform of a Scout. And then swift came the thought of his mother. Oh, if she were only with him again! How proud she would be to read those clippings!

The same afternoon a reporter for the *New York World* came to see him — a pleasant, interested young fellow who somehow overcame Rodney's reluctance to talk about his adventure. And after he had gone, Rodney lay back on the pillows, tired but wonderfully happy — happy just to be alive and to feel that before very much longer he would be up and about again.

The next day, following an examination by the doctor, an orderly assisted him to a chair, and wheeled him out into a spacious sun room, where there were other chairs occupied by men wrapped in blankets, some of them smoking, some reading, and a few talking with friends who had come to see them.

For some time Rodney sat in the warm sunlight and allowed his thoughts to wander pleasantly — thoughts of Commander Redfield, who was now on his way in the *Dinsmore* to Newport

News, thoughts of his uncle and of his brother Scouts and of old Captain Tuckaberry and his wife. Happening to look up, he gave a start of surprise and uttered a delighted exclamation that caused several of the invalids near by to glance at him inquiringly. Coming towards him across the floor was a tall, dark-eyed, smiling boy in a light gray suit, carrying a book under one arm.

"Ted!" cried Rodney, stretching forth his hand.

Ted Morris seized it in both of his, murmuring, "Rod! Rod! How are you? Gosh! But you look good to me!"

"Not half as good as you look to me!" replied Rodney, grinning up at him. "Grab that chair over there, Ted, and pull it up!"

Ted Morris put the book in his friend's lap. "'Moby Dick' — have you read it? Fine! I thought it ought to appeal to you — chock-a-block full of adventures on the sea!" He drew the vacant chair up beside Rodney's and sat down.

For a few seconds the two friends just looked

at each other, grinning, happy merely to be together again. Then Ted said, "I 'm not going to ask you to tell me a thing about what you did, much as I want to hear it from your own lips. I guess maybe you 'd rather forget it for a while, and anyway I 've read the papers! You know how pleased I am, Rod! Gosh! If anything like that had happened to me — I mean, if I thought I could do what you did — oh, heck! You understand! How soon are you going to leave the hospital?"

"In a few days maybe, the way I 'm feeling. I 'm a bit weak in the pins now, but that 'll pass."

"Sure it will! Is there anything I can do for you, Rod? You know you 've only got to speak the word."

"Thanks, Ted! There is something you can do."

"Just name it!"

"Tell me about yourself," said Rodney. "How are things going?"

Ted lowered his glance abruptly to the floor. "Well," he replied after a pause, "to tell you

the plain truth, I never was cut out for a business man. I don't like it —"

"Then why don't you ditch it?"

Ted's dark eyes met his friend's in a look partly of inquiry, partly of hope.

"Why don't you make another stab at Annapolis?" continued Rodney. "Work for another appointment, then take the exams and pass them! You can do it, I know you can."

Ted Morris brought his hands suddenly together. "It 's just what I hoped you 'd say!" he exclaimed. "Listen, Rod, I 've got to tell you this. I left Boston, mad as a hornet — wounded pride, you know. Once I calmed down, I knew what a rotten, miserable quitter I was! But I would n't admit it; I would n't turn back, because — well, pride again. I tried to like the job I took, and all the while I hated it and hated myself. I kept thinking of you, plugging along with all sorts of handicaps, and I hated myself still more. I felt badly when I heard you 'd passed the exams but could n't get in — badly for you, I mean. But when you said you were n't beaten — gosh, I could have hugged

you! And then I was ashamed of myself more than ever for quitting. I don't know how many times I said to myself I 'd try again, but I did n't make a move — until I saw the accounts of your spendid act in the papers. Was n't I set up, though! Know what I did? I gave them two weeks' notice at the plant!"

"And you 're going to try for another appointment?"

"I certainly am! What 's more, if I get it, I 'm going to pass the exams!"

"Ted, that 's the best news ever!"

Ted nodded, still serious. "Nobody knows better than I do how I wasted my time at Masterson's, even though I did succeed in completing the course with credit. Well, in the fall I'm going to swallow my pride, and put my nose to the grindstone again and keep it there!" His mouth set, his chin lifted to an aggressive angle, and it seemed to Rodney that his friend's face wore a look of quiet determination, almost of maturity, that he had never seen in it before.

Later as Ted rose to go, he said, "I 'll be in to see you every day, Rod." He suddenly laughed

as he pressed Rodney's hand, adding, "I think I 've missed you all this while nearly as much as I 've missed the cats of Beacon Hill — and that 's saying something!"

Long after Ted had gone Rodney continued to picture him as he had looked when he spoke of putting his nose to the grindstone and keeping it there — his lips tight set, his chin lifted, his brows wrinkled in a frown of determination. Rodney was happy — happy on his own account, happy on Ted's. He felt somehow that in the coming year there would be fair sailing for both of them.

He received a visit from one more person before he was discharged from the hospital — a visit that surprised him more than the one from Ted Morris.

"Mr. Devereux is downstairs," the nurse said to him one morning. "I told him you would be down."

"Mr. Devereux?" repeated Rodney.

"Mr. Holbrook Devereux of Boston," added the nurse.

Rodney, fully dressed now in a suit that Ted

had procured for him, went down to the guest room, wondering at the presence of the man who had offered him such a good start in business. What in the world had brought Mr. Devereux to the hospital? Was he going to repeat his offer? No, Rodney decided, that was not likely. He continued to ponder until he reached the guest room and saw his visitor rise from one of the chairs and come striding toward him.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Devereux, grasping Rodney's hand. "My congratulations both on your heroism and your recovery!"

"Thank you, Mr. Devereux," said Rodney. "It 's surely good of you to come here."

"I 'm on my way to Washington," replied the business man. "I just thought I 'd drop in and see how you were getting along. Anything you need?"

"No, I think not, sir. Friends have been extremely kind."

"It was a splendid thing you did, my boy! We are proud of you, those of us who know you. I 've read the papers, of course, but I 'd like to

hear your own story of it. Sometimes, you know, the papers get things wrong."

"The accounts I saw were correct for the most part," Rodney replied, "except perhaps for a bit of exaggeration now and then."

Mr. Devereux laughed, but his eyes studied Rodney's face as he listened to him describe what had taken place on board the *Falcon* and afterward. Rodney spoke in a quiet voice, modestly and with an attempt to be clear and straightforward.

Mr. Devereux seemed pleased. "That is fine!" he said at the end. "And now what?"

"I expect to return to Boston next week," Rodney replied. "I hope to work at my old job if it 's open, meanwhile waiting to see what my chances are for getting an appointment to Annapolis next year."

"It 's still your aim?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"It would be nice if you did n't have to delay another year."

"Yes, I know; I 'd counted on getting in this year. It was quite a disappointment, and it

almost knocked me out. But I 'm content to wait. You know, sir, I passed the examinations, so they 're out of the way."

"Yes, I know that." Mr. Devereux's eyes were still scrutinizing him; they seemed to twinkle as he held out his hand. "I must go along," he said. "I 'm glad to find you so well. My regards to Mr. Holman when you see him again. Good-by."

Rodney returned upstairs, almost as puzzled as he had been before he came down. It seemed to him extraordinarily kind and thoughtful of Mr. Devereux to stop and see him even though he did happen to be in the city.

It was a warm, oppressive morning in May when Rodney returned to Boston. He had slept well on the train; and as he strode forth from the South Station he felt as strong as on that October morning almost three years before, when he had looked on Boston for the first time. His adventure had left him none the worse, it seemed, except for a scar on the palm of his left hand — an honorable scar.

As he walked up Summer Street he could not

help thinking of that far-off October morning. Then he had come to Boston sorrowfully, with a multitude of uncertainties before him; he had felt disheartened in the face of them, but somehow he had managed to go on. Now his sorrow, though always very real, was less acute; time had worked its healing magic. There were still uncertainties, but his courage to face them was greater. Picking his way among the crowds, he felt a confidence that he had never known before. Unconsciously he compared his difficulties with his ordeal on the *Falcon* and in the water — and beside it they seemed easy.

How good it was to see Beacon Hill again! Yes, and there was a cat slinking along close to an alleyway on Pinckney Street — one of Ted's cats! He mounted the stairs to his uncle's apartment. There was no response to his knocks; Uncle Jonathan doubtless was at his favorite haunt. Rodney fitted his key into the lock and opened the door.

The first thing that met his eye was a pile of letters on the table; they were all addressed to him, and among them were several opened

telegrams. He read the telegrams first — one from Mr. Heath, one from Frank O'Connor, another from the whole Troop. All carried messages of congratulation for his exploit and good wishes for the future; and reading them, Rodney was touched and longed to see his old friends once more. There was a letter from Mr. Fisher and letters also from several of the boys in Mr. Holman's Troop — long letters full of friendliness and unstinted admiration. He read them beside the open window while a sultry west wind caused beads of perspiration to stand out on his face. He did not notice how hot it was; he was aware only of the contents of the letters.

When he had finished the last one, he put them back on the table; and then he noticed a long, unstamped envelope on the other side of the lamp, and a smaller envelope on top of it. Both were addressed to him.

He picked up the small envelope and, inserting his finger under the flap, tore it open. It contained a short, hand-written note from Mr. Devereux, from Washington. He read:

"My dear Owen:

"I did my best for you, but I think you 'd have got it anyway. You had attracted their notice. Hearty congratulations!

Yours,
Holbrook Devereux."

Rodney knit his brows as he read the note over and over. What did it mean? Whose notice had he attracted?

He put it down at last, still mystified. He picked up the long envelope and, breaking the seal, spread the paper out and began to read. Suddenly, with a gasp of astonishment, he dropped into a chair. For a few seconds the room, the furniture, seemed to revolve about him. He moistened his lips, blinked his eyes; then lifting the paper, he began to read again.

Yes, there it was in black and white! "In recognition of service heroically rendered without thought of self —" In a flash of understanding Mr. Devereux's note was suddenly clear to him. He had been appointed to Annapolis by the President! The President of

the United States had chosen him for midshipman-at-large for that year!

Rodney sat there, dazed, gazing straight ahead of him into space. Appointed by the President! Honored by the first citizen of the land! It was almost too much for his mind to grasp. Never in his wildest moments had he even dreamed of such a thing!

Gradually his pulses ceased to pound; his thoughts became clearer, more orderly, and through quivering lips he murmured happily, "I 'm a midshipman! I 've won!" And suddenly he felt as he had felt on the day of the championship basketball game at Middleton, after he had led his team to an almost impossible victory.

Then his thoughts turned to his mother — his mother who more than any one else had made this latest and greater victory possible; and it seemed almost as if he could hear her speaking to him again: "The Three Points of Honor, Rodney! You were true to them, and you won!"

He rose with tears in his eyes. Oh, if she could only know! If she could only be with

him at that moment! But perhaps she did know! Perhaps — he strode abruptly to the window and gazed upward at a patch of sky, remembering her words: "Think of me always as somewhere above, watching over you." Yes, he was sure she knew! And he was sure she was smiling!

A puff of cool air touched his face, lightly like a soft caress. The leaves of an ailanthus tree across the way fluttered, and suddenly he was aware that the breeze had changed. The east wind was blowing, and the breath of the sea was in his nostrils.

WOOD